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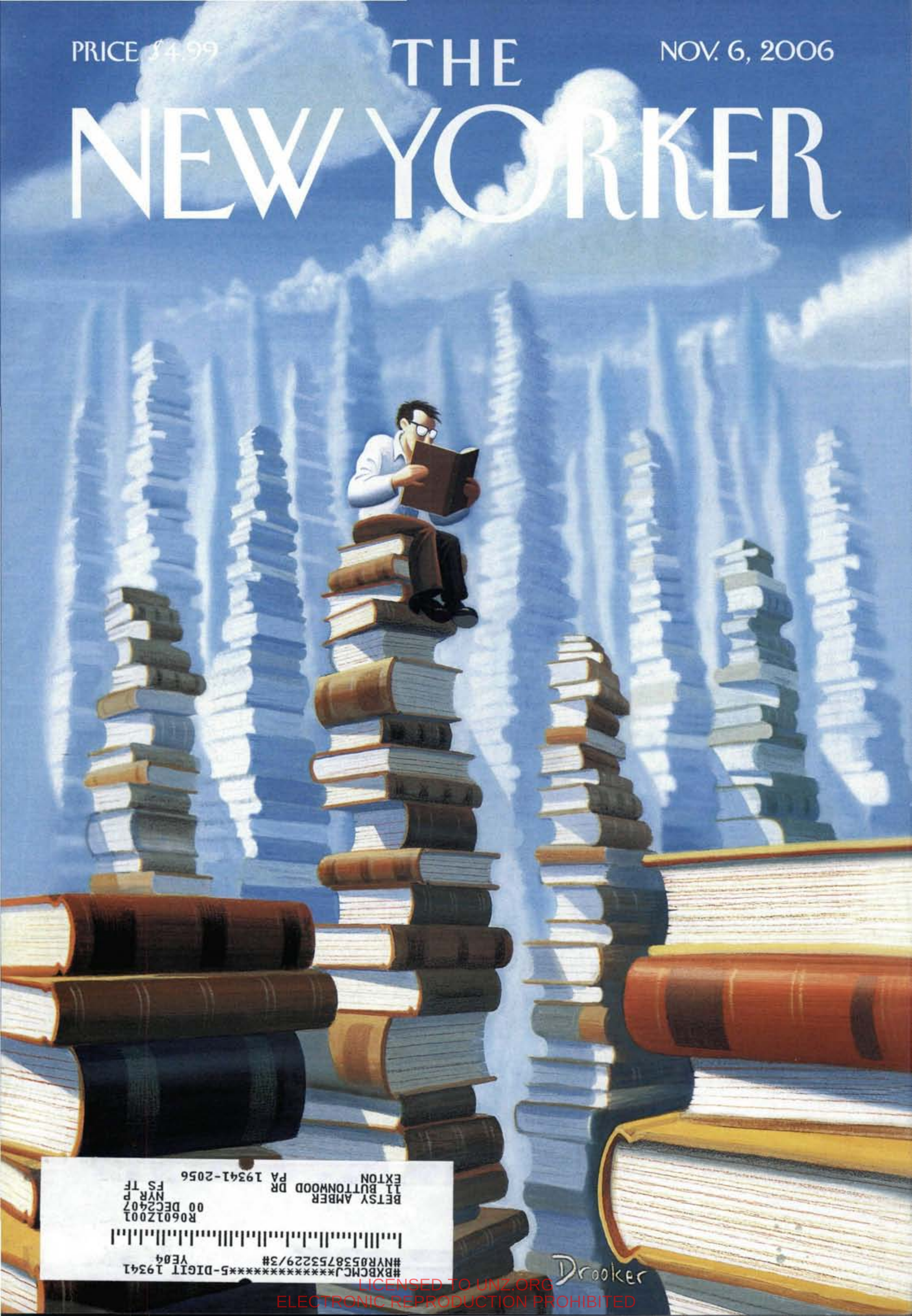
THE NEW YORKER

NOV. 6, 2006



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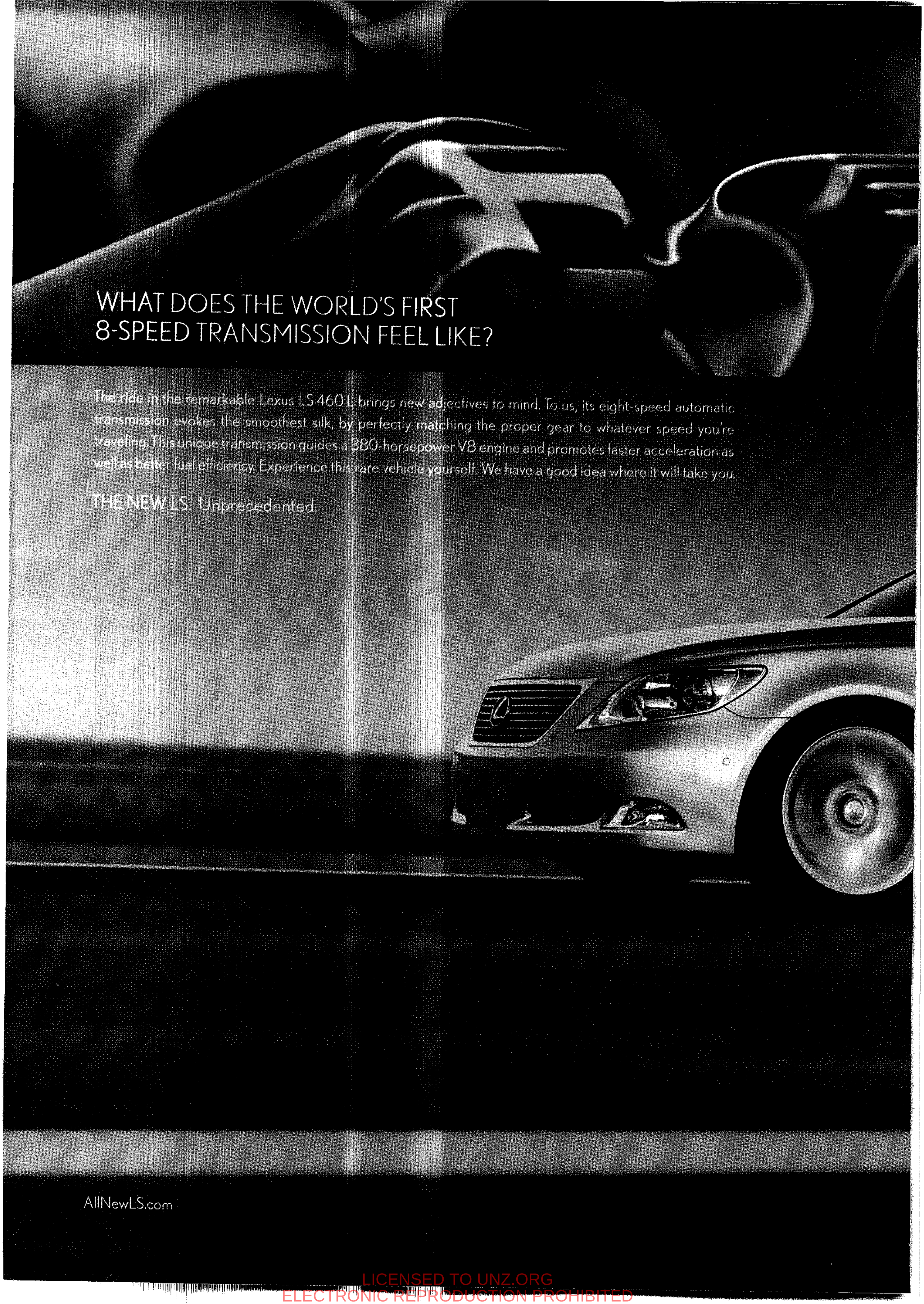

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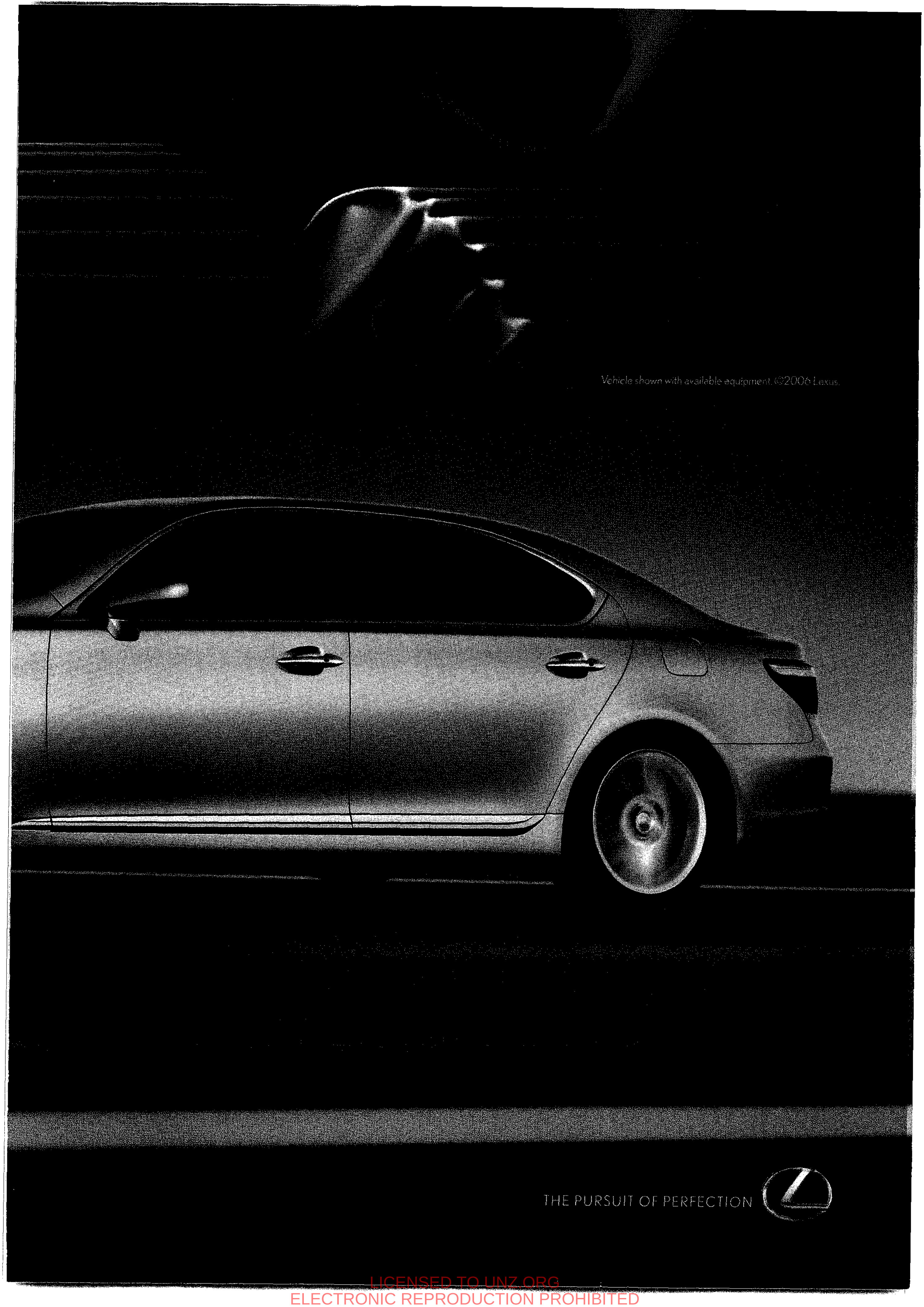
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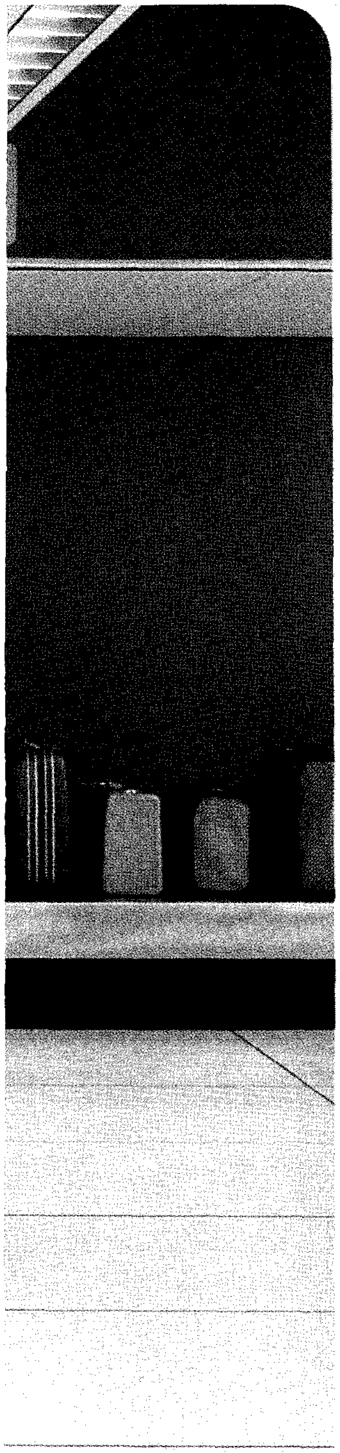

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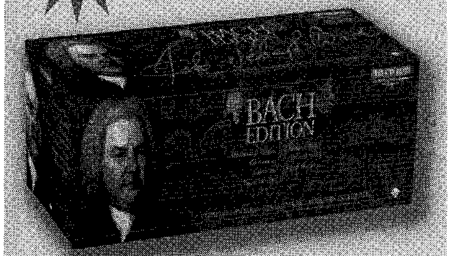

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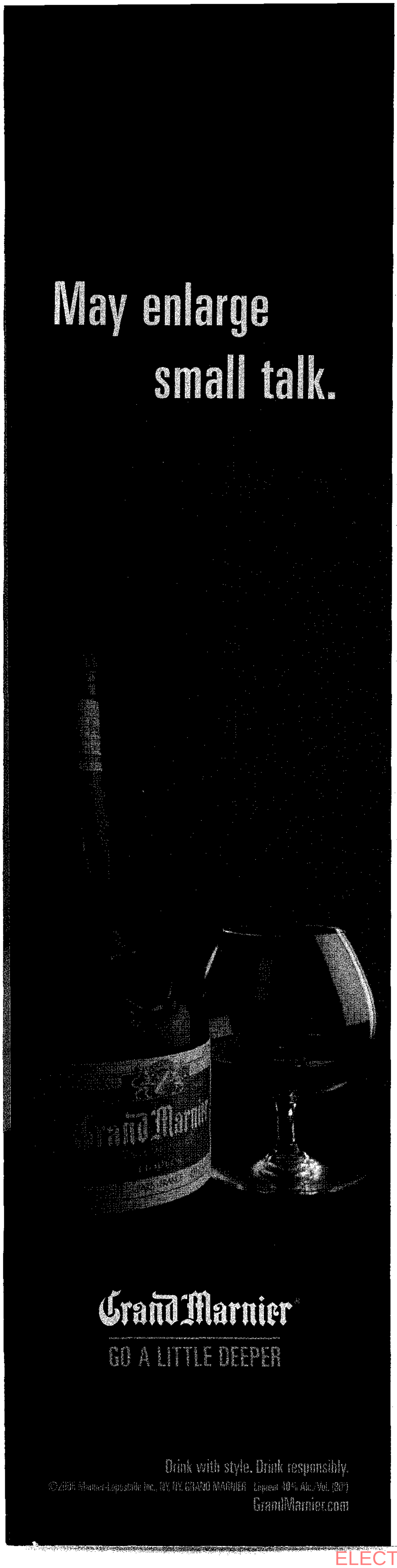

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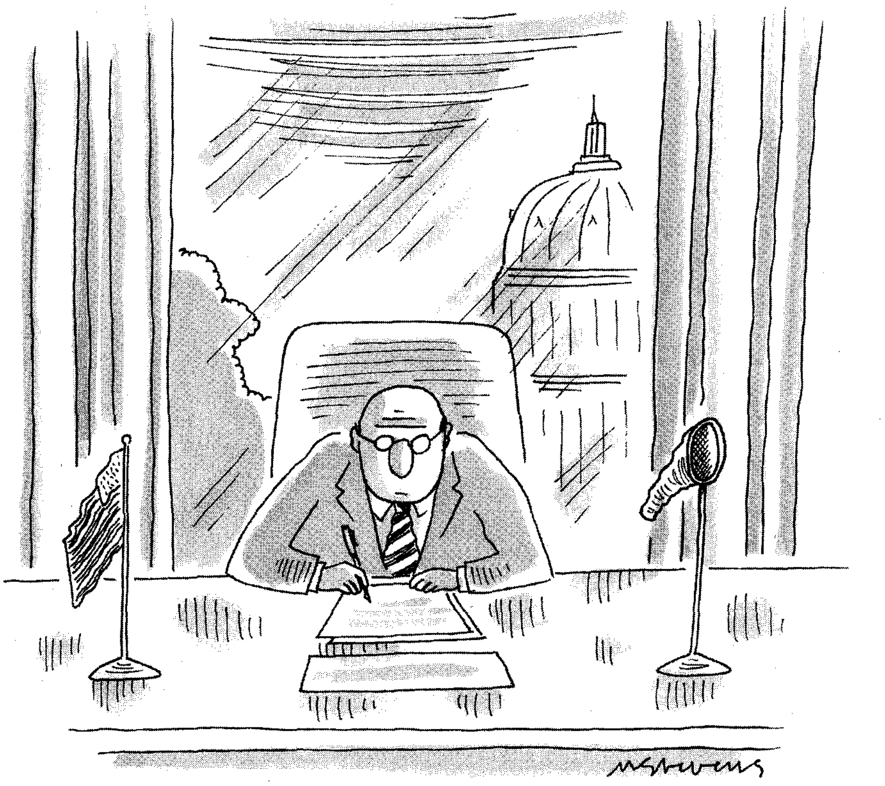

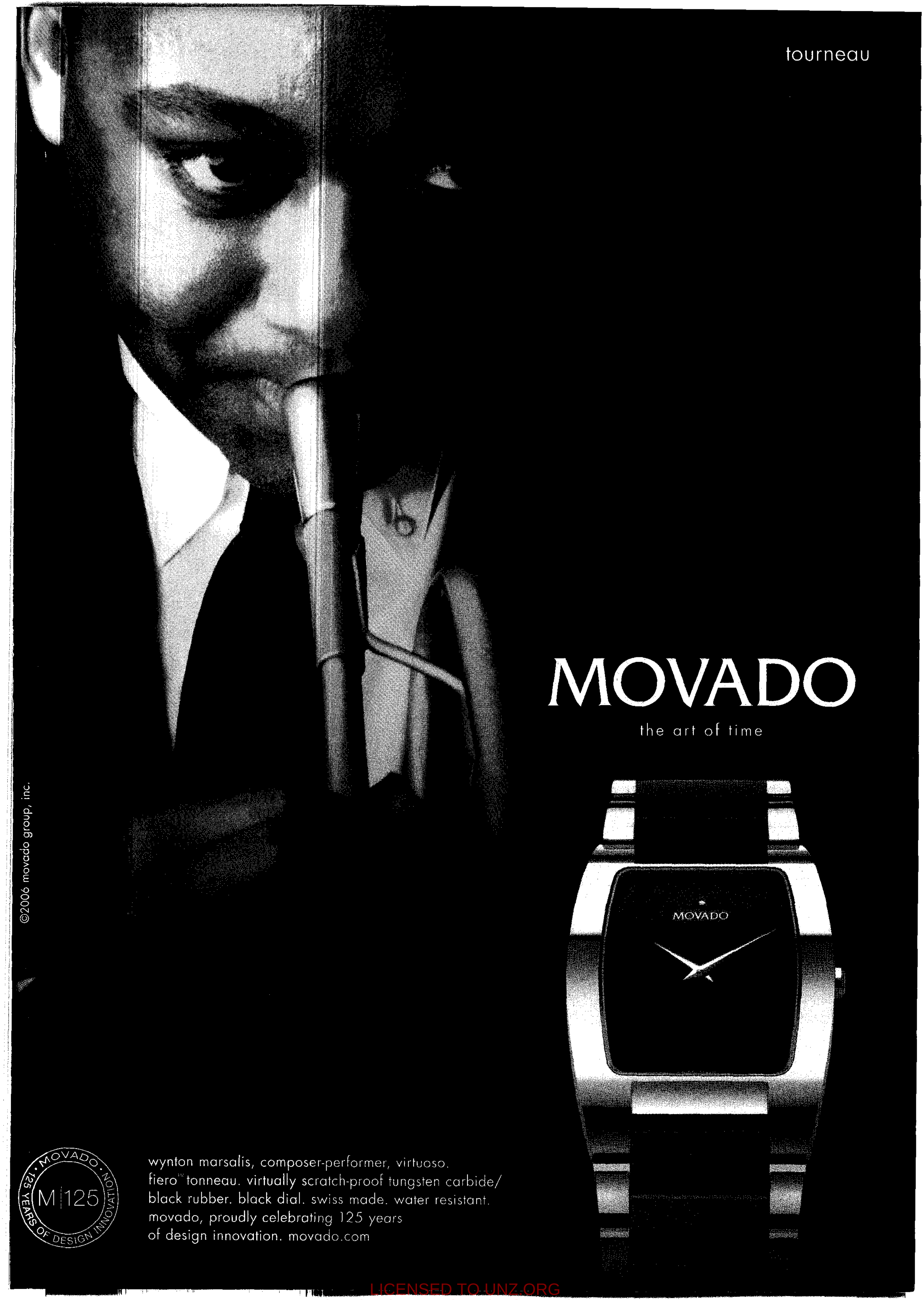
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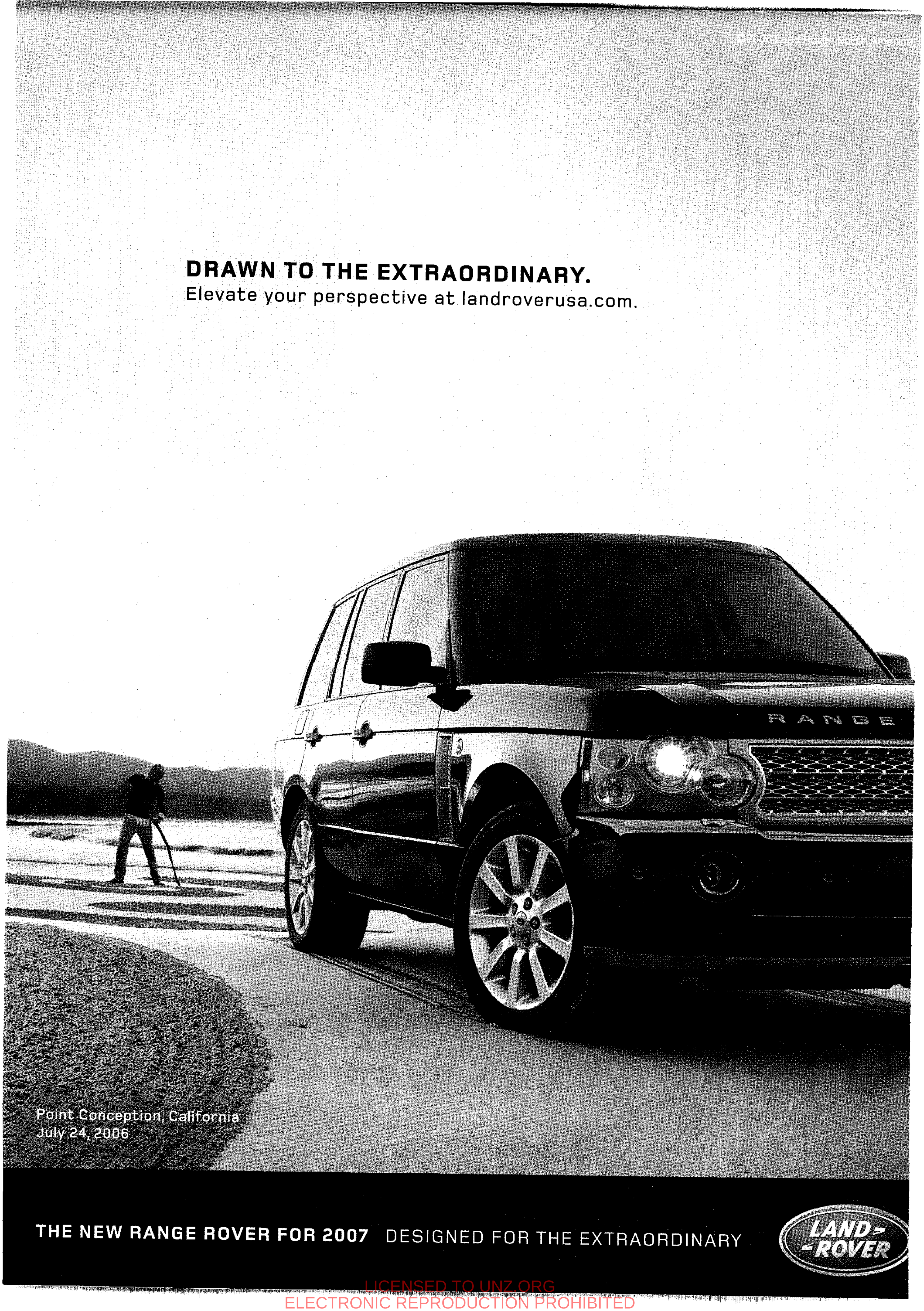
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REAL FOOD

I have all but given up watching the Food Network, because, even after reading Bill Buford's article, I simply don't get it ("TV Dinners," October 2nd). I don't understand how throwing together pre-packaged ingredients constitutes making dinner. Rachael Ray is one prominent advocate of this method, but many other "chefs" now found on the Food Network do the same. I also don't understand what a bartender competition has to do with cooking, or why it is important for anyone to know how to make a skyline out of Rice Krispies treats, or who should care how the food court at the local mall was designed. We don't want to be entertained. We just want someone to show us how to make real meals.

Melana Songe
Norristown, Pa.

HITCHENS, RIGHT OR WRONG

Ian Parker chronicles Christopher Hitchens's bruising rhetorical style but is largely silent on the soundness of his reasoning ("He Knew He Was Right," October 16th). Hitchens's ability to win arguments whether he is mostly right or mostly wrong is remarkable, but this skill is inimical to reasoned discourse. Those proficient in the art of intellectual bullying need not be well informed or rational to win arguments, so they tend to become intellectually lazy, while those with more pedestrian rhetorical gifts may explore a subject more deeply. Intellectual humility is inseparable from wisdom; fortified with certainty and unencumbered by serious reflection, the intellectual bully troubles himself less with the truth than with winning the debate. Consider Hitchens's obstinacy in continuing to justify the Iraq war as a colossal Manichaean struggle against evil, despite overwhelming evidence that the war is creating more evil than it is eliminating.

Philip Hansten
Port Ludlow, Wash.

While I, too, rued the day that Hitchens ostensibly gave up fighting the good fight, I was relieved to find in Parker's portrait of him a few reasons to reconsider. Whatever Hitchens's defections, anyone who can dispatch Ann Coulter's latest screed without compunction, who has the temerity to write a book called "God Is Not Great," and who thinks Henry Kissinger should be prosecuted for war crimes some thirty years after the fact—well, surely such a person hasn't abandoned every rampart on the left. Should Hitchens, however, put away the bottle at his desk, check into rehab, and come out piously proclaiming himself redeemed, then I'll join those who are eager to see him run out of town on a rail.

David Bulgin
Greensboro, N.C.

THE BROOKLYN CONTEXT

Paul Goldberger writes, in his criticism of Frank Gehry's designs for Atlantic Yards, Bruce Ratner's massive, twenty-two-acre proposed development in Brooklyn, "The problem with trying to do Bilbao on this scale is that it ceases to be an eccentric counterpoint to the context. It is the context" (The Sky Line, October 16th). We in Brooklyn knew that Gehry was embarking upon a project whose context he did not, and could not, understand back in 2003, when his designs were unveiled. Gehry exclaimed that he was excited "to build a neighborhood from scratch." The neighborhood—the context—already existed. With the renderings we've seen so far from Gehry, it's clear that he has not taken the context into account.

Daniel Goldstein
Develop Don't Destroy Brooklyn
Brooklyn, N.Y.

•

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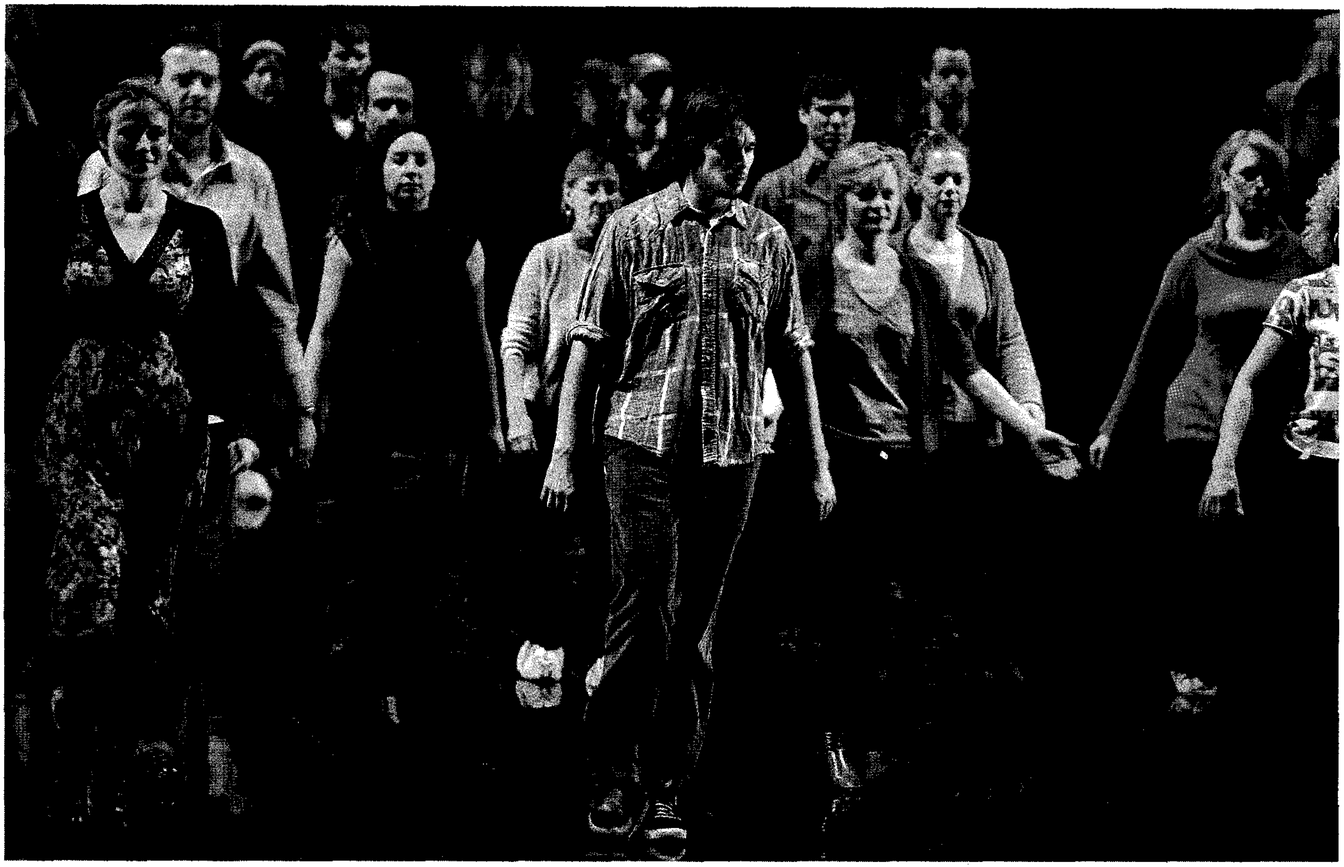

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
DOUBLE DUTY

Last year, the director John Doyle breathed new life into the Broadway scene with his imaginative staging of Stephen Sondheim's dark musical "Sweeney Todd," in which the actors onstage served as the orchestra, too. This season, Doyle tries the same trick with another Sondheim musical, "Company." (See page 13.)

NIGHT LIFE
SAYING GOODBYE

Stuart A. Staples, an English singer with a charred, rumbling voice reminiscent of Leonard Cohen's, recently took time off from his chamber-pop band, the Tindersticks, to record "Leaving Songs," an album of chilling ballads. He brings the new material to St. Ann's Warehouse this week. (See page 18.)

ART
VIENNESE SUITE

Recent visitors to the Neue Galerie were probably too absorbed by Klimt's portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer to notice its frame, which was designed by the Austrian architect Josef Hoffmann (1870-1956). A more in-depth exploration of Hoffmann's work goes on display at the Neue this week: four interiors that he designed between 1902 and 1913, complete with furniture, textiles, ceramics, and more. The portrait of Adele will still be hanging, *mit* frame. (See page 23.)

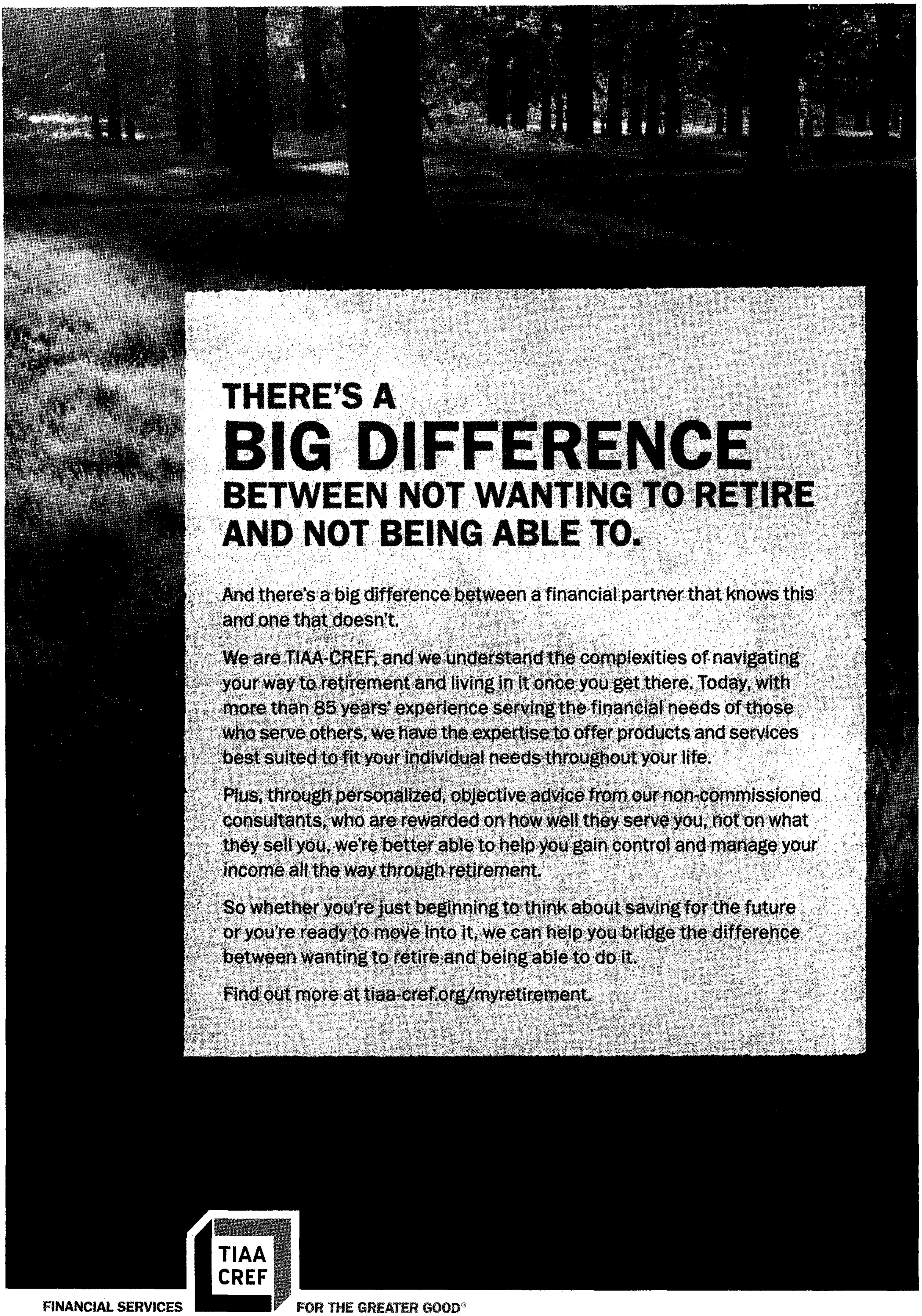
CLASSICAL MUSIC
REAL SIMPLE

The violinist Gidon Kremer and the pianist Krystian Zimerman offer a no-frills program at Carnegie Hall—all three of Brahms's violin sonatas, which were originally written for his close friend Joseph Joachim. (See page 31.)

MOVIES
FALLING STAR

Born in 1892, Mabel Normand started acting in 1910 and quickly became a star in Mack Sennett's Keystone comedies. She lived a riotous and scandal-ridden life, and died in 1930. "Head Over Heels," a 1920 feature, was thought to be lost until a print turned up in a Massachusetts basement. Walter Reade Theatre is screening it along with early and late short films. (See page 40.)

A rehearsal for the first part of Tom Stoppard's three-part play, "The Coast of Utopia." Photograph by Gus Powell.

C36141 © 2006 Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association-College Retirement Equities Fund (TIAA-CREF), 730 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017.
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WINTER CULTURAL CALENDAR

Borough of Manhattan Community College • New York

Salute to Lou Donaldson

January 4th, 8 P.M. • tribecapac.org

Alto saxophonist Lou Donaldson helped spawn the soul-jazz movement of the sixties with his funky grooves infused with bebop vigor. The Tribeca Performing Arts Center celebrates the originator of "Alligator Boogaloo" in a show featuring Donaldson and his quartet. Special guests include the pianist Cyrus Chestnut and the saxophonist Eric Alexander.

University of Washington • Seattle

Markus Groh

January 9th, 8 P.M. • uwworldseries.org

At thirty-seven, the classical pianist Markus Groh, who is based in Berlin and New York, has been entrancing audiences internationally with his distinctive recitals since his 1995 victory at Belgium's Queen Elisabeth Competition. Groh specializes in imaginative and powerful interpretations of masterworks by the likes of Brahms, Mozart, and, especially, Liszt.

University of Chicago • Chicago

"Uncle Vanya," by Anton Chekhov

January 11th–February 11th (times vary) • courttheatre.uchicago.edu

Lending his characteristic style and unconventional flair to this classic Chekhov tale of unrequited love and unrealized dreams, director Charles Newell conceives an "Uncle Vanya" that explores the human condition with tenderness, wit, and deep emotion. The tragicomedy, presented by the Court Theatre and the Museum of Contemporary Art, will be staged at the MCA.

University of Pennsylvania • Philadelphia

"Amajuba: Like Doves We Rise"

Yael Farber, Artistic Director

January 23rd–25th, 7:30 P.M.; January 26th–27th, 8 P.M.; January 28th, 3 P.M. • pennpresents.org

Five South African actors who came of age during the apartheid era tell their childhood stories in "Amajuba." Each personal tale resonates with a universal theme: the resiliency of the human spirit when faced with struggle and loss. These performers invite the audience into their world with dance, song, and humor.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Sekou Sundiata: "the 51st (dream) state"

January 24th, 7:30 P.M. • carolinaperformingarts.org

The Harlem-born spoken-word artist Sekou Sundiata presents his compelling theatrical work "the 51st (dream) state," a multimedia cycle of songs, poems, and monologues that contemplate our national identity and mythologies. A groove poet who records for pop singer Ani DiFranco's Righteous Babe label, Sundiata performs his state-of-America's-soul address with a live band.

Kean University • Union, New Jersey

Les Ballets Africains

February 2nd, 7:30 P.M. • keanstage.com

The Republic of Guinea's national ensemble since 1958, Les Ballets Africains, is Africa's foremost touring company. Expect unbridled exuberance as the thirty-member troupe drums, dances, and performs acrobatic feats, while enacting traditional and contemporary African tales.

The George Washington University • Washington, D.C.

Paco de Lucía

February 9th, 8 P.M. • lisner.org

Paco de Lucía, a master of flamenco guitar, is also the instrument's most influential performer. A restless innovator, de Lucía has also broken with tradition by incorporating jazz, pop, and world music with graceful and fiery passion.

California Institute of Technology • Pasadena, Calif.

Mendelssohn String Quartet

February 11th, 3 P.M. • events.caltech.edu

One of classical music's most inventive chamber groups, the Mendelssohn String Quartet, performs music by Puccini, Barber, Wolf, and Verdi with the Grammy- and Emmy award-winning baritone Sanford Sylvan.

Michigan State University • East Lansing

Mario Vargas Llosa

February 26th, 7:30 P.M. • whartoncenter.com

Acclaimed novelist, playwright, and essayist Mario Vargas Llosa, credited with helping to revitalize Latin American fiction, talks about literature and politics. "A Fish in the Water" is a memoir of his venture into politics as a 1990 presidential candidate in Peru. Vargas Llosa has said, "If you are killed because you are a writer, that's the maximum expression of respect."

Michigan State University • East Lansing

Azar Nafisi

March 27th, 7:30 P.M. • whartoncenter.com

The writer Azar Nafisi is best known for her nonfiction work "Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books." Electrifying and often harrowing, her portrait of the Islamic revolution in Iran, and how it affected one university professor and her students, has earned high acclaim and an enthusiastic fans. "Reading Lolita in Tehran" is an incisive exploration of the transformative powers of fiction—even in a world of tyranny.

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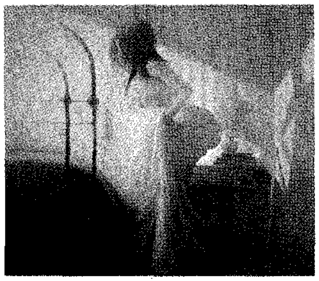

LISA YUSKAVAGE, "CHANGING" (2005)

Lisa Yuskavage is a leader in the recent development of neo-Old Masterish painting that brings subtle skills to bear on vulgar subjects. Her speciality is pulchritudinous young womanhood winsomely awallow in narcissistic melancholy. Her nude or lightly dressed figures, alone or joined in vaguely desperate, oddly chaste embraces, are cartoonish and borderline grotesque; but delicately rounded form, unerring touch, and luminous color, augmented by bravura passages of still-life and landscape, charge them with irresistible poetry. The effect celebrates traditional painting as a divine power that can redeem pretty much anything. Two current shows display Yuskavage's range. The most absorbing, at Zwirner & Wirth, features tiny, two-figure paintings that become monumental when viewed close up. At Zwirner, large canvases sacrifice intensity for scale. Their rewards are mainly decorative, with effulgent colors that are like vaporized flavors and scents: lemon, mango, lavender. It's not easy to care about these sad sweeties, whose undeniable mystery veils secrets that we might prefer not to know, but it's also unnecessary. Paint adores them on our behalf.

—*Peter Schjeldahl*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE AMERICAN PILOT
Manhattan Theatre Club presents the U.S. première of this drama by David Greig, about a pilot who crash-lands in a rural village in a war-torn country. Previews begin Nov. 2. (City Center, Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE COAST OF UTOPIA, PART ONE: VOYAGE
The first of three plays by Tom Stoppard about a group of nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals. The ensemble cast includes Ethan Hawke, Brían F. O'Byrne, Jennifer Ehle, and Billy Crudup. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

COMPANY
John Doyle directs the Stephen Sondheim and George Furth Tony Award-winning musical from 1970, in which a bachelor observes the lives of five married couples. In previews. (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

DR. SEUSS' HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS!—THE MUSICAL
A musical-theatre version of the children's story. With book and lyrics by Timothy Mason. Directed by Matt August. In previews. (Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.)

DURANGO
The world première of a new play by Julia Cho, about a Korean father who embarks on a road trip with his teen-age sons. Previews begin Nov. 7. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

EVIL DEAD THE MUSICAL
Hinton Battle and Christopher Bond direct this campy musical adaptation of Sam Raimi's horror-film franchise. Opens Nov. 1. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

GREY GARDENS
Christine Ebersole and Mary Louise Wilson star in Doug Wright's musical based on the 1975 Maysles-brothers documentary about Edith Bouvier Beale and her daughter, Little Edie. In previews. Opens Nov. 2. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

HOW TO SAVE THE WORLD AND FIND TRUE LOVE IN 90 MINUTES
A musical comedy directed and choreographed by Christopher Gattelli, set at the United Nations. With book and lyrics by Jonathan Karp and music by Seth Weinstein. Previews begin Nov. 4. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

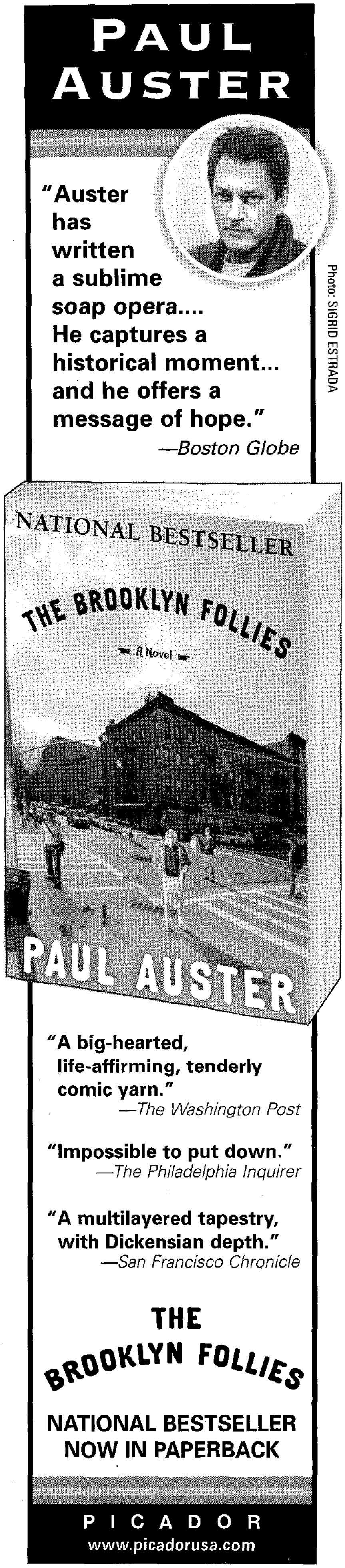
THE INTERNATIONALIST
Anne Washburn wrote this play about an American businessman working in a country where he does not speak the language. In previews. Opens Nov. 7. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

THE LITTLE DOG LAUGHED
The Off Broadway hit play by Douglas Carter Beane, about a closeted movie star and his overzealous agent, gets transferred to Broadway. Starring Julie White, Tom Everett Scott, and Johnny Galecki. Scott Ellis directs. In previews. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

MARY POPPINS
The smash hit from London's West End comes to Broadway. Starring Ashley Brown as Mary Poppins and Gavin Lee as Bert; Richard Eyre directs. In previews. (New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747.)

MIMI LE DUCK
Eartha Kitt is featured in a new musical, in which a Mormon housewife from Idaho leaves her successful QVC duck-painting business for Paris. In previews. Opens Nov. 6. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

LES MISÉRABLES
A new production of the musical based on Victor Hugo's epic, set in nineteenth-century France. John Caird directs. In previews. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)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—*San Francisco Chronicle*

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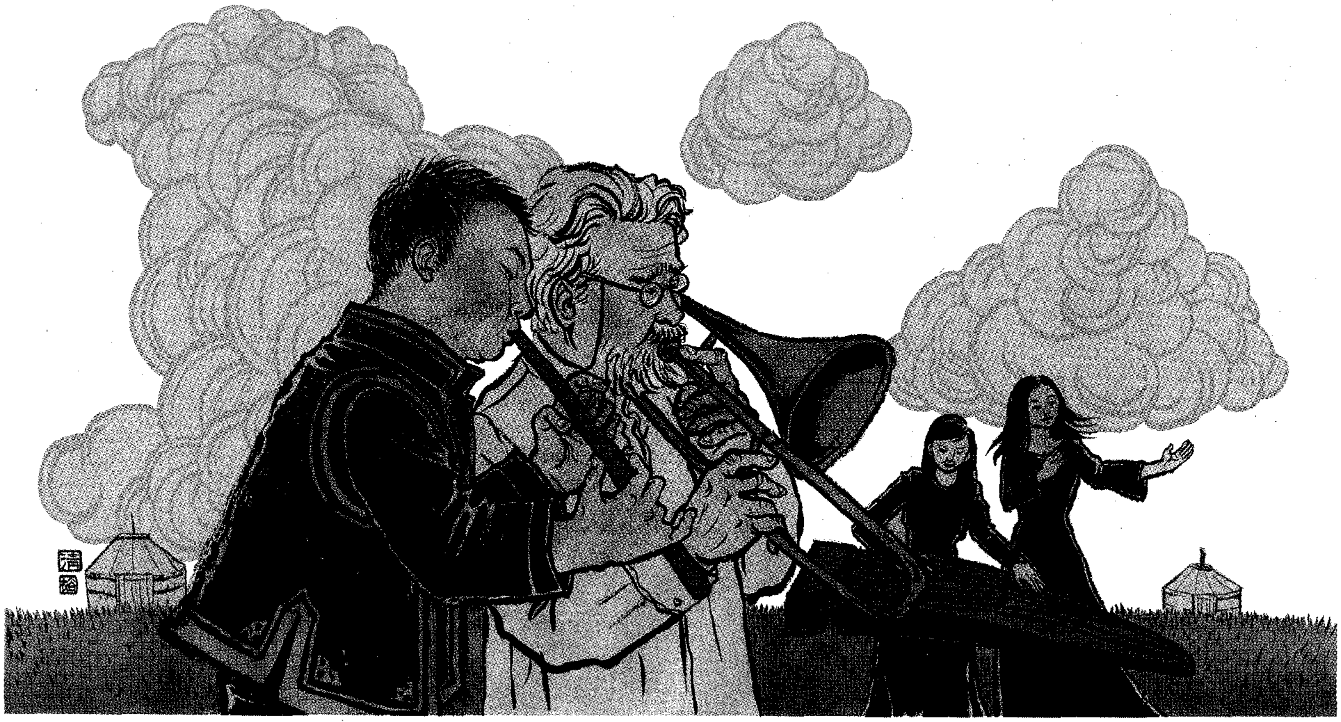
AN OAK TREE
Tim Crouch wrote and stars in this drama, about two men brought together by a tragic accident. The rotating cast includes F. Murray Abraham and James Urbaniak. In previews. Opens Nov. 4. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.)

POST MORTEM
The Flea presents a new comedy by A. R. Gurney, set at a faith-based university in the future. Jim Simpson directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 2. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)



The World Music Institute presents the jazz trombonist Roswell Rudd and the Mongolian Buryat Band at Zankel Hall.

YUKO SHIMIZU

REGRETS ONLY
Manhattan Theatre Club presents the première of a new comedy of manners by Paul Rudnick, about the social mores of a set of wealthy Manhattanites. Starring Christine Baranski and George Grizzard. In previews. (City Center, Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

STRIKING 12
A musical created and performed by the pop band GrooveLily, about a man who is lured out of his shell by a salesgirl on New Year's Eve. Ted Sperling directs. Previews begin Nov. 6. (Daryl Roth, 101 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER
Blythe Danner stars in the Roundabout Theatre Company's revival of Tennessee Williams's psychological drama. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

NOW PLAYING

BUTLEY
Nathan Lane stars in Simon Gray's dark comedy from 1972. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE CLEAN HOUSE
A new play by Sarah Ruhl, about a doctor whose housekeeper prefers telling jokes to cleaning the apartment. With Blair Brown and Jill Clayburgh. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

EMERGENCE-SEE!
The internal war between enslavement and empowerment is acted out in the African-American actor and playwright Daniel Beaty's one-man extravaganza, under the direction of Kenny Leon. Beaty leaps from character to character, as he sings, recites, acts, and declaims about the divisions between his personal history and his race's impoverishment. Although he sails mightily close to cliché at crucial moments, the intelligence of what he has to say is never in doubt. Unfortunately, however, self-involvement and self-congratulation on this scale are never an entirely pretty sight, or really a dramatic one. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/30/06.) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

THE HAIRY APE
Eugene O'Neill's awkward parable of class dislocation in industrial nineteen-twenties America centers on a proletarian strongman, the shipboard coal stoker Yank (Gregory Derelian), whose existence is altered when a millionaire's daughter vamps her way down to the ship's engine room. When she faints in shock, Yank climbs up from his Stygian stokehole and disembarks on dry land, hoping to find a home for himself somewhere among the swells, criminals, or radicals. The director, Ciarán O'Reilly, and his limber cast give the play a hallucinatory, jazz-age ambiance, but it remains something of a vintage literary curiosity. (Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

MY NAME IS RACHEL CORRIE
A riveting play under the deft direction of Alan Rickman, who also co-edited it, with the journalist Katharine Viner. The bright, fine-boned Megan Dodds, who radiates a sense of both privilege and pluck, resuscitates from diary entries and e-mails the voice and being of the American pro-Palestinian activist Rachel Corrie, who, at the age of twenty-three, was crushed to death by an Israeli Caterpillar when she tried to shield the home of a Palestinian civilian in the Gaza Strip. Corrie, it seems, is a far more complex character than this play intends her to be, and her words bear witness to the deracinating madness of war, a hysteria that infects not only those doing the fighting but also those ambitious to do the saving. (10/30/06) (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 212-307-4100.)

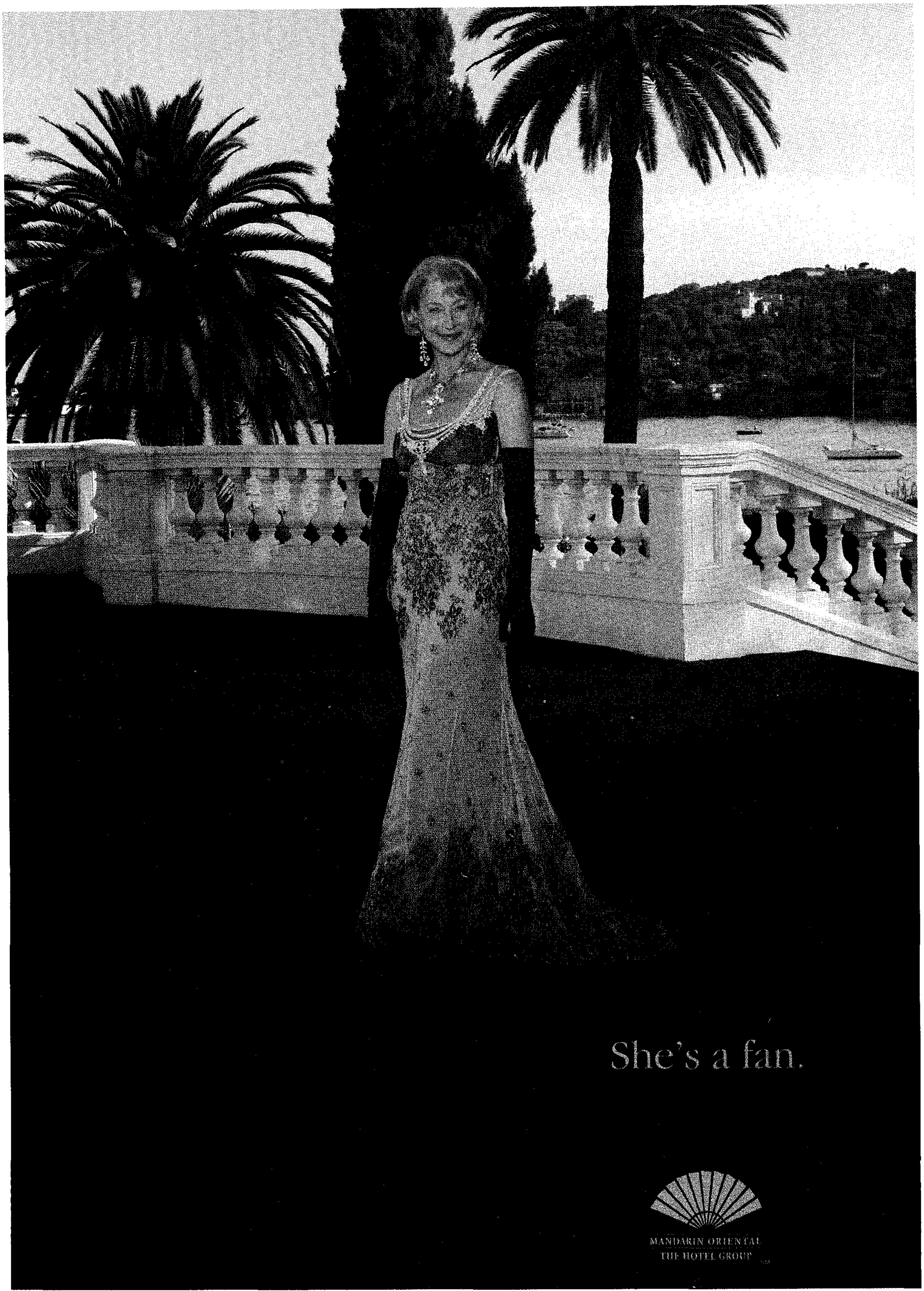
PORT AUTHORITY THROW DOWN
Working Theatre presents a new play by Mike Batistick, in which a Pakistani immigrant investigates the arrest of his brother. (45 Below, at 45 Bleecker St. 212-352-3101.)

A SMALL, MELODRAMATIC STORY
In this stirring new work by Stephen Belber, presented by the LAByrinth Theatre Company, O (Quincy Tyler Bernstine), a modern-day Pandora from the D.C. area, has two men in her life: Keith (Lee Sellars), a conspiracy theorist who works in the federal archives, and his boxing partner, Perry (Isiah Whitlock, Jr.), a cop with an enigmatic past. O pursues Perry's demons, putting their burgeoning relationship at risk. Belber's intelligent script, directed by Lucie Tiberghien and acted by a wonderful cast, is seamless: a bitterly funny parable in which the allure of knowledge—and of love—has inexorable consequences. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Through Nov. 5.)

SOUTHERN COMFORTS
Kathleen Clark's amiably unsentimental play concerns the late-life romance between two independent-minded retirees, a honey-voiced Tennessee grandmother, Amanda (played with vivacious charm by Penny Fuller), and a taciturn Yankee widower, Gus (brought to crusty life by Larry Keith). Flirtatious by nature, Amanda is a lonely risk-taker who quickly torpedoes Gus's defenses. Clark portrays their desultory courtship in believable tones, showing how a lifetime of accrued possessions—and defensive habits—can be an impediment to living happily ever after. Judith Ivey acquits herself well as the director of this sweetly perceptive piece. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through Nov. 4.)

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'
Twyla Tharp conceived, directed, and choreographed this jukebox musical set to the songs of Bob Dylan. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

THE VOYAGE OF THE CARCASS
A play within a play by Dan O'Brien, in which the inner play, a commedia-dell'arte account of an Arctic expedition gone awry, upstages the outer one, an angsty love triangle involving three struggling theatre artists. As Bane Barrington, the captain of the S.S. Carcass, Dan Fogler ("The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee") puts his gift for clowning on full display; as Bill, the frustrated actor who's rehearsing the role of Barrington, he's a ham trapped in a self-serious exercise in naturalism. The goal of O'Brien's metatheatrics, it seems, is to show how the collaborative process can create its own kind of cabin fever. But, in doing so, he splashes cold water on a fun romp. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)



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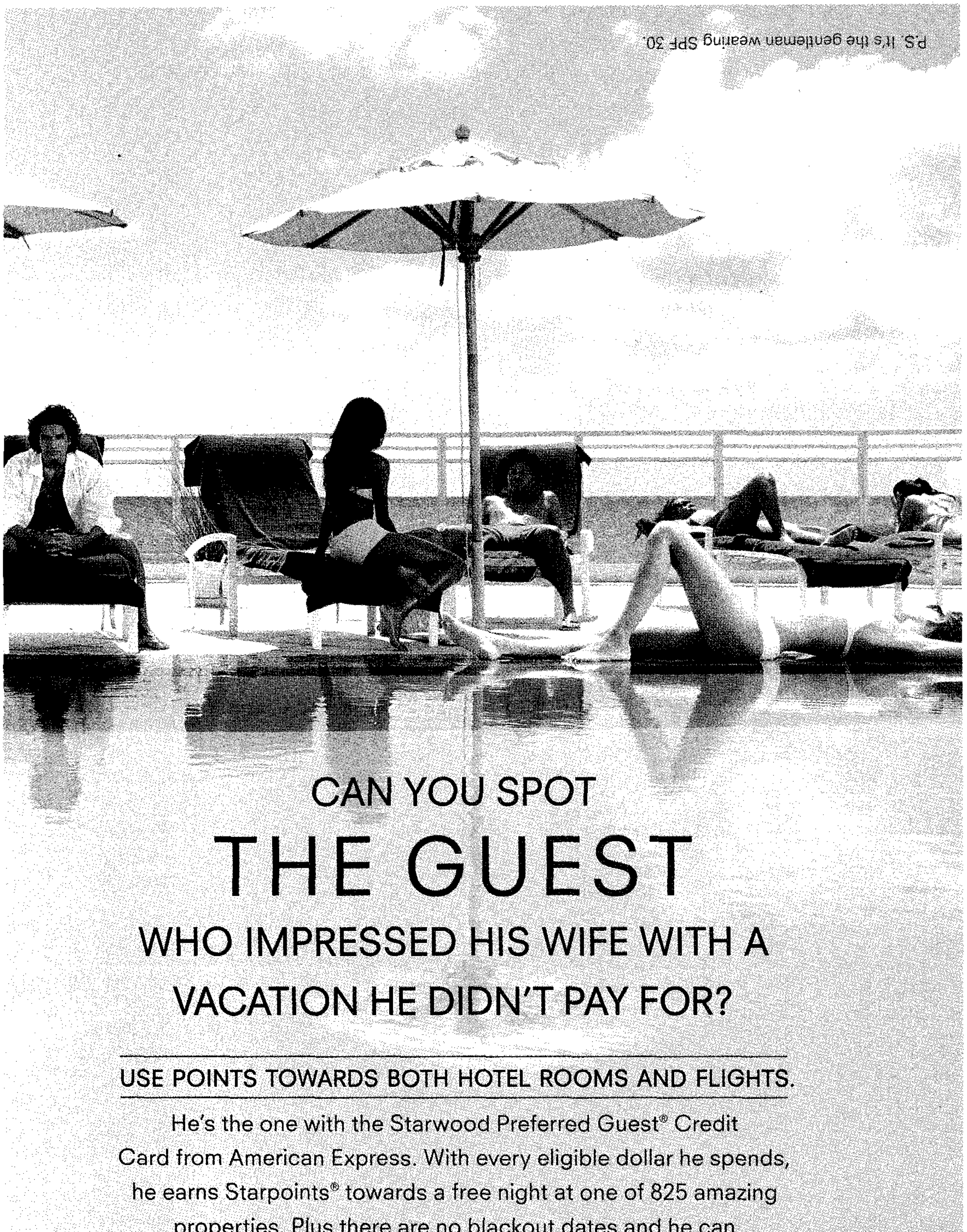
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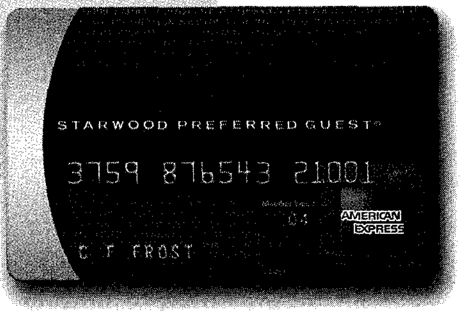
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ARMS AND THE MAN: Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. **THE FANTASTICKS:** Snapple Theatre Center, 210 W. 50th St. 212-307-4100. **HEARTBREAK HOUSE:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. **KING LEAR:** H.S.A., 647 St. Nicholas Ave. 212-868-4444. Through Nov. 5. **LOSING LOUIE:** Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **MARTIN SHORT: FAME BECOMES ME:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **NO CHILD . . . :** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **THE WEDDING SINGER:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **WRECKS:** Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—The eclectic hip-hop producer **Prince Paul** (of the Handsome Boy Modeling School) has his own gig, "The Ill Out Show," on XM satellite radio's old-school channel, Rhyme 65. On Oct. 31, he throws a party here with friends from his extraterrestrial activities. Nov. 3-4: The soulful vocalist **Al Green.**

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Nov. 1: The **Bird and the Bee** are Inara George, a singer (and daughter of the late Little Feat leader, Lowell George), and Greg Kurstin, a producer and keyboardist who has worked with everyone from the Flaming Lips to Beck. The pair come from Los Angeles, where they've been perfecting a smooth pop sound that's indebted to vintage bossa nova, sixties girl groups, and contemporary hip-hop. They're playing early on a big CMJ bill (see below) topped by the Minneapolis indie rockers **Tapes 'N Tapes.** Nov. 2: Another CMJ show. The **Shins,** from New Mexico, rock with a retro flair and the jangly wonderment of classic psychedelic pop.

CMJ MUSIC MARATHON
The annual festival of meeting, greeting, and grabbing at the next big thing brings together a thousand bands from every conceivable genre. Most of the club listings this week are part of the festival. (Oct. 31-Nov. 4. For more information, visit www.cmj.com.)

HAMMERSTEIN BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—Nov. 3: The indie-rock quintet of the moment, the **Decemberists** play a clever folk-pop full of wistful charms, although lately it is bordering on progressive rock. They have a penchant for high concepts—their latest album, "The Crane Wife," is a reworking of the Japanese folktale of the same name—with unconventional song lengths and brazenly indulgent organ solos. With the folk revivalist **Alasdair Roberts,** a Scotsman with a burnished voice.

HIRO BALLROOM
The Maritime Hotel, 371 W. 16th St. (866-468-7619)—Oct. 31: A CMJ show for folks old enough (or at least mature enough) to be making mortgage payments, with the singer-songwriters **Suzanne Vega** and **Keren Ann,** the duo the **Bird and the Bee** (see the Bowery Ballroom), and the soul singer **Stephanie McKay.**

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—Oct. 31: A rare Stateside show by the **Cardigans.** Hailing from Sweden, this band had a big hit ten years ago with the irresistible pop confection "Lovefool," but they've been on a sugar-free diet for years. Their latest, "Super Extra Gravity," is a dark rock record. Nov. 1: The seminal female punk band the **Slits** has reunited. Nov. 4: The Virginia rappers **Clipse.**

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Nov. 1-2: When the lead singer of **Alice in Chains,** Layne Staley, succumbed to heroin addiction and died, in 2002, many assumed it spelled the end of the Seattle heavyweights' career. Four years later, however, the guitarist, Jerry Cantrell, has reassembled the surviving members and recruited a new vocalist, William DuVall (of Comes with the Fall). Nov. 3: The **Black Keys** are Dan Auerbach and Patrick Carney, two childhood friends and former lawn-care workers with a thing for thick and heavy blues rock. Auerbach plays guitar and sings; Carney hits the skins. Their latest album, "Magic Potion," is forty or so minutes of stomping drums and grinding chords. Nov. 7: The British trio **Placebo** were often compared with the Canadian prog-metal group Rush because of the high-pitched similarities between their respective vocalists, Brian Molko and Geddy Lee. Placebo, however, traffics in stylish androgynous punk-pop. With **She Wants Revenge,** a Los Angeles duo that plays icy, dark tunes fit for New Wave weddings and wakes.

ST. ANN'S WAREHOUSE
38 Water St., Brooklyn (718-254-8779)—Oct. 31-Nov. 1: The theatrical London trio the **Tiger Lillies.** Nov. 4: **Stuart A. Staples,** the front man for the English chamber-pop band the Tindersticks, has a new solo album, "Leaving Songs," which he recorded in Nashville.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—Nov. 1: The exceptional Afro-Peruvian singer **Susana Baca.** With the singer-songwriter **Piers Faccini.** An Englishman who grew up in France and still lives there, Faccini favors the global approach to the blues popularized by the likes of Jack Johnson and Ben Harper.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Nov. 1: The **Knife** are Olof Dreijer and Karin Dreijer Andersson, a pair of artsy siblings from Sweden who have been making snappy electronic music and videos since the late nineties. One of their songs, "Heartbeats," received an acoustic cover by their countryman the guitarist and singer José González (his parents are Argentinean; he sings in English) and was used to great effect in a commercial for high-definition televisions in England recently, bringing them some attention (and a pile of cash). For this multimedia engagement, they are collaborating with the artist Andreas Nilsson, the director of that commercial.

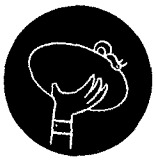
WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
The trombonist **Roswell Rudd** started out playing Dixieland music and then established himself in the sixties as the leading practitioner of free jazz on his chosen instrument. Lately, he has been touring and recording with musicians from across the globe. He teamed up with the kora player Toumani Diabate and other traditional musicians from Mali for the 2003 album "MALIcool." He followed that recording last year with the album "Blue Mongol," featuring the **Mongolian Buryat Band,** a five-piece ensemble that includes a Tuvan throat singer and a player of the horse-head bass. They join him at Zankel Hall on Nov. 4 for an audacious night of fascinating music. (57th St. at Seventh Ave. For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Nov. 1-4: **Dave Holland,** jazz's premier modern bassist, has kept the nucleus of his quintet intact for some time now; their intimacy reveals itself in near-telepathic communication. They'll be playing material from Holland's new release, "Critical Mass."

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Nov. 1-2: The gospel and pop singer **Oleta Adams,** best known for her work with Tears for Fears and her own hit single, "Get Here." Nov. 3-5: Celebrating the release of his new live album, "Democracy," the pianist **Kenny Werner** calls on participants from the recording, including the saxophonist **David Sanchez** and the trumpeter **Kenny Wheeler.**

TABLES FOR TWO
L'ATELIER DE JOËL ROBUCHON

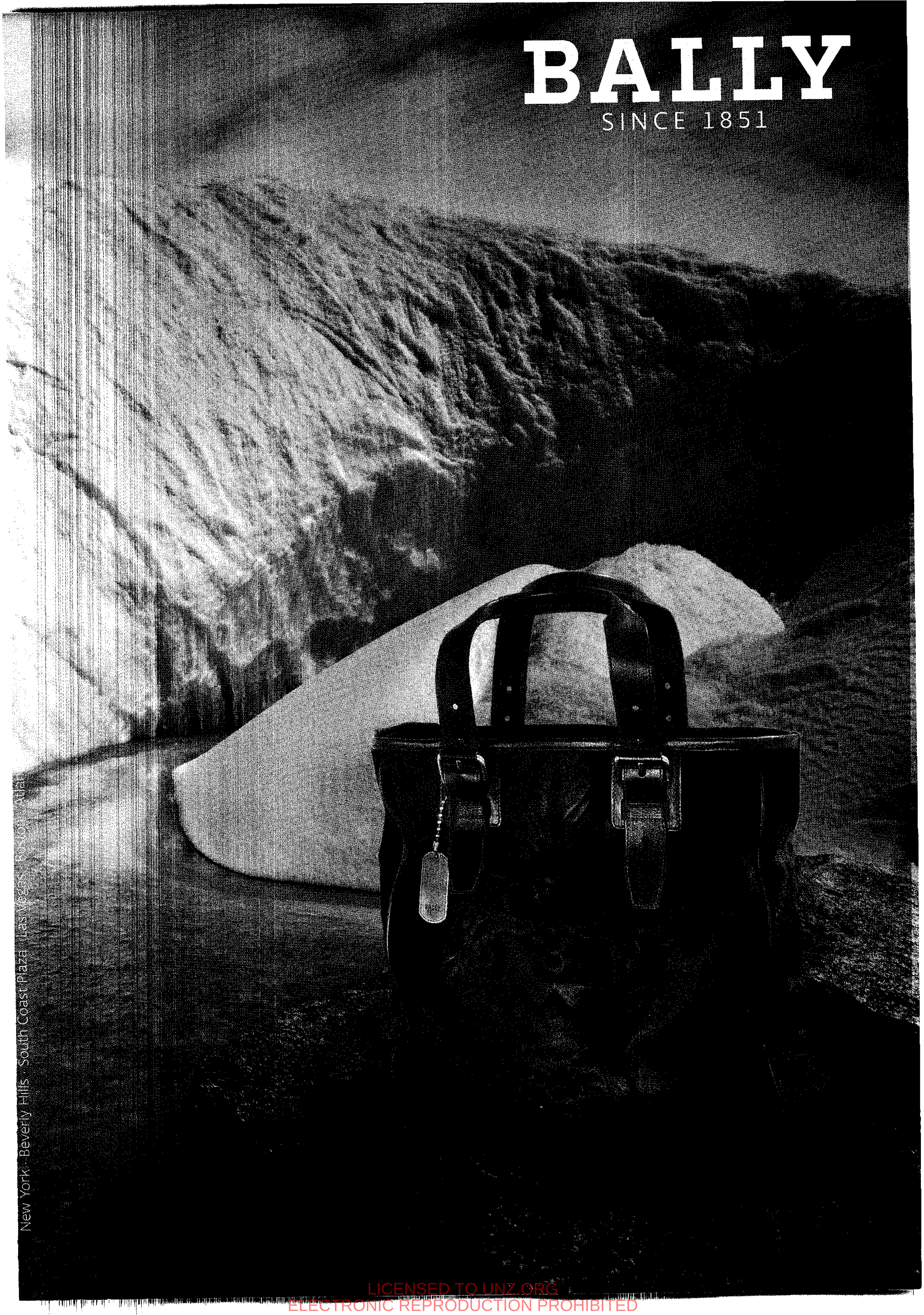


57 E. 57th St. (212-350-6658)—Few cities pride themselves on sophisticated luxury as much as Paris and New York, and when famous French chefs cross the Atlantic the result is often an uneasy face-off. A Michelin three-star chef, Joël Robuchon might expect to fare better: after his sudden retirement, a decade ago, his comeback, in 2003, with the first Atelier, was a bit of a revolution in the conservative context of Parisian dining. It didn't take reservations, and its customers were seated at a counter facing the kitchen. Following branches in Las Vegas and Tokyo (another one opened in London, in September), the iteration at the Four Seasons hotel has tables as well as the counter seating; the center of the restaurant is a black marble kitchen, largely for show—there is an ordinary-looking kitchen at the back.

At its best, Robuchon's food has the air of a miracle, albeit a carefully engineered one. Sea urchin comes in a lobster gelée that is topped with cauliflower-infused cream and dotted with parsley purée, placed like numbers on a clock. It is served in a clear bubble, making it look like something Barbarella might eat. But beyond all the madly intensive labor of the dish's presentation the gravity-defying effects of the jelly enhance the strange, delicate texture of the urchin. There are other similarly small, striking dishes on the menu, but not everything is quite so impressive. A langoustine in a fritter of remarkable lightness was served with a lacklustre basil dipping sauce, and duck breast stuffed with foie gras, though rich and satisfying, was rather pedestrian.

The staff is so friendly that it seems churlish to point out that they're not always very knowledgeable about the menu, and inquiries after your happiness can't mask the fact that the wait between dishes is highly variable. And it's odd, having been refused a dinner reservation before half past ten, to arrive in a restaurant that's barely more than half full, and odder still to be told, one night, that the kitchen closes at eleven, only to see guests being seated well after that a couple of nights later. Of course, caprice at the reservations desk can do much for the mystique of a restaurant—there's a masochistic kick in being snubbed—but this smacked of chaos, which is far less sexy. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $34-$58.)

—Leo Carey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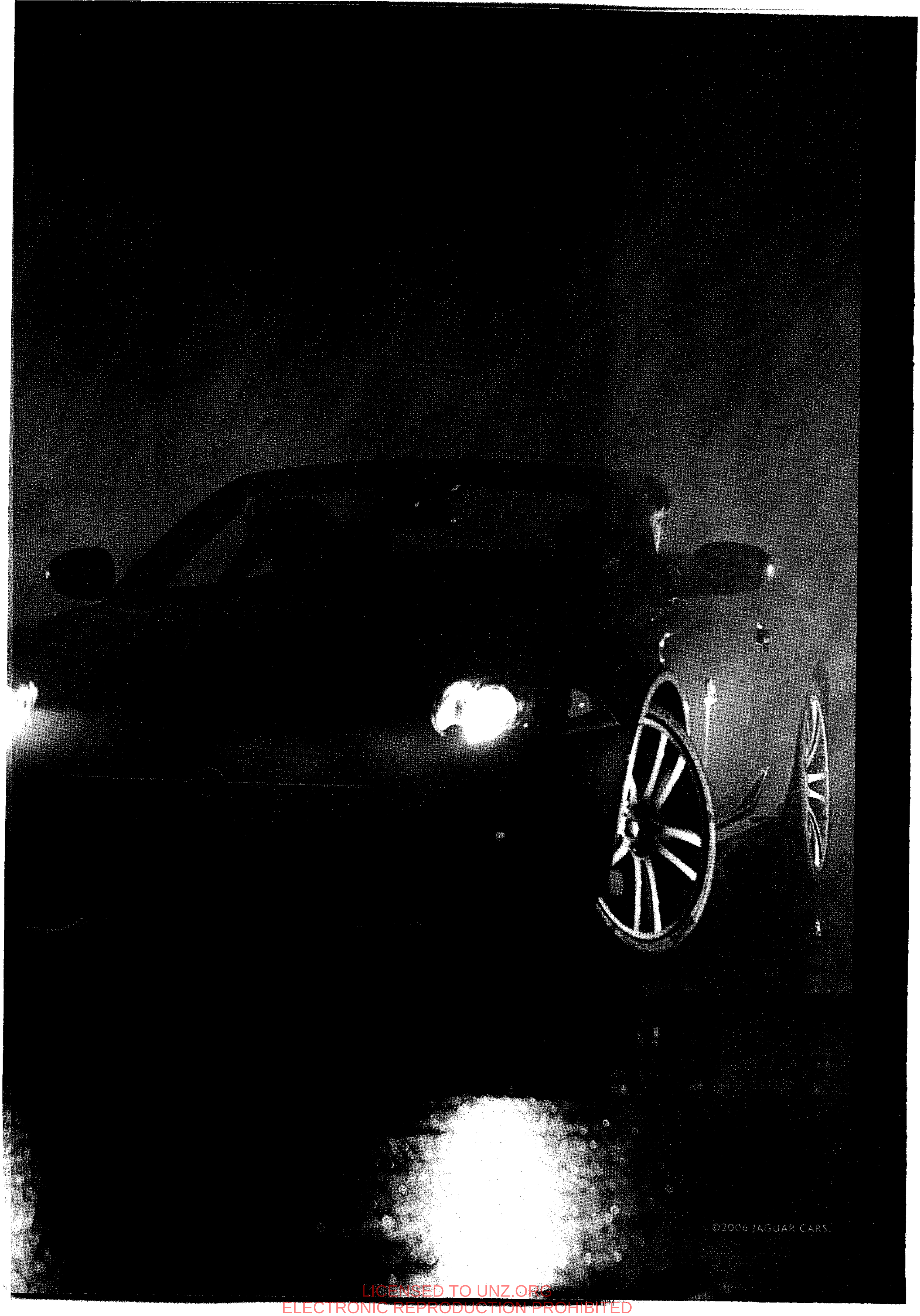
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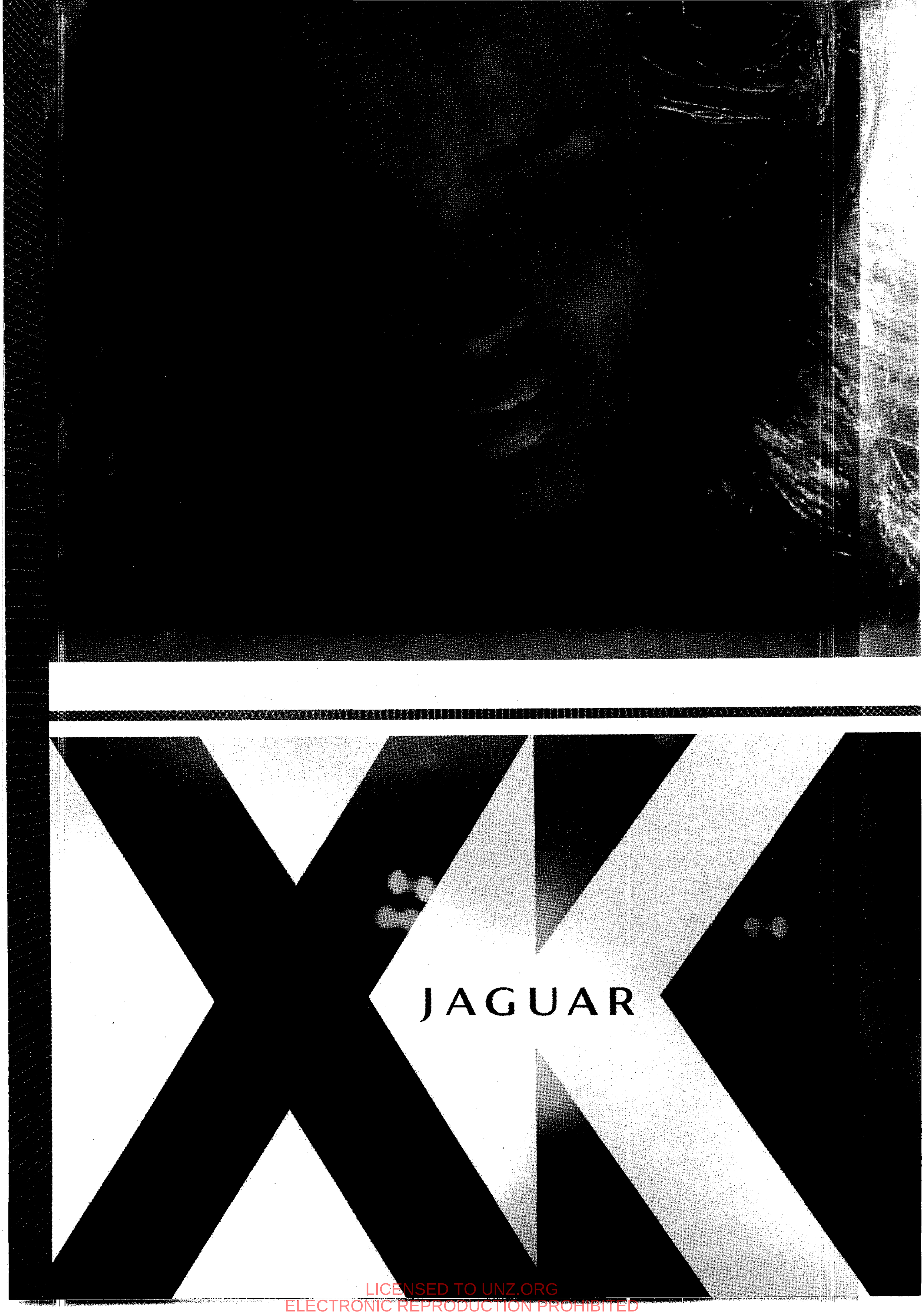
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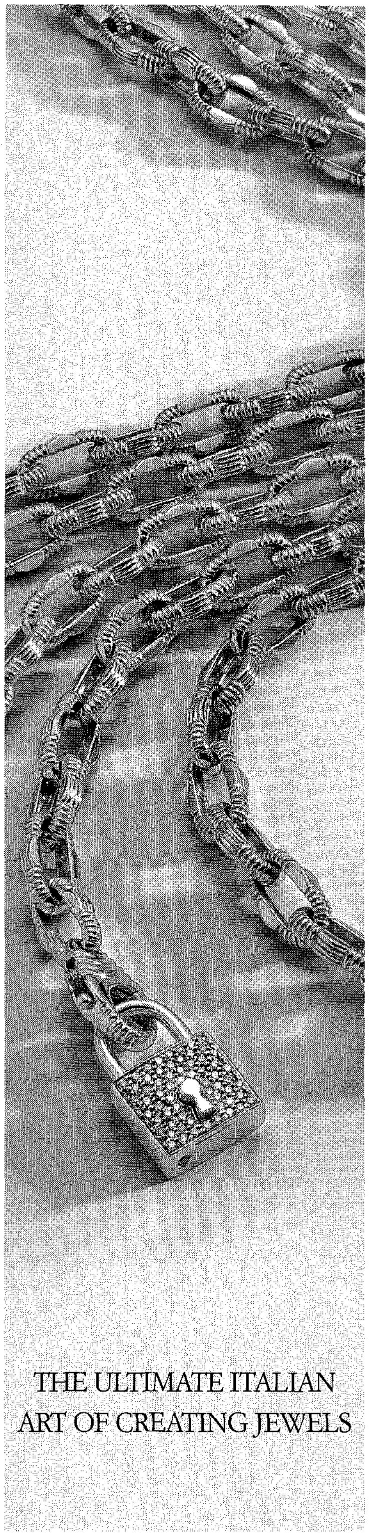

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CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through Nov. 11: The Broadway veteran **Elaine Stritch.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Oct. 31-Nov. 5: **Ira Sullivan,** the legendary Chicago saxophonist and trumpeter, will tangle with a younger Windy City saxophonist, **Eric Alexander.**

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Oct. 31-Nov. 11: The actor **Lorenzo Lamas,** of the soap opera "The Bold and the Beautiful," makes his cabaret début.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Nov. 2-5: **Bill Bruford's Earthworks.** The former Yes and King Crimson drummer fronts an acoustic-based jazz ensemble that thrives on his prodigious percussive skills and surprisingly compelling writing.

JAZZ GALLERY
290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—Nov. 3-6: The trumpeter and composer **Roy Hargrove,** who goes for everything from straight-ahead bop (with his quintet) to funk, hip-hop, soul, and R. & B. (with his group the RH Factor), leads a big band.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Art Pepper referred to **George Cables** as "Mr. Beautiful," and when his trusted pianist coaxes nectar out of a ballad or negotiates a bebop run with supernal grace you understand why the late saxophone legend was so smitten. Cables, a West Coast fixture, visits Nov. 2-5.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—As a sideman on Michael Carvin's recent self-titled release, which is a part of the Marsalis Music Honors Series, the tenor saxophonist **Marcus Strickland** stole—with the leader's blessings—the album right out of the drummer's hands. He leads his own quartet here Nov. 3.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Oct. 31-Nov. 5: The **Lou Donaldson** quartet. With one foot in well-turned bop soil and the other in R. & B. territory, the alto saxophonist Donaldson produces both virtuosity and entertainment. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Americans in Paris, 1860-1900"** presents some hundred paintings by Whistler, Cassatt, Sargent, Eakins, and others who travelled from the U.S. to find inspiration in what was then the art capital of the world. Through Jan. 28. ♦ **"Coaxing the Spirits to Dance: Art of the Papuan Gulf."** Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde."** The Parisian gallerist Vollard (1866-1939) was an early champion of Matisse, Bonnard, van Gogh, and many others; this unusually canted show comprises samples of the work that they made with his encouragement and patronage. The two giants of the show's title are represented with canvases from solo shows that Vollard mounted in 1895 and 1901, respectively. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"New Orleans After the Flood: Photographs by Robert Polidori."** Through Dec. 10. ♦ **"Set in Stone: The Face in Medieval Sculpture."** Through Feb. 19. ♦ **"Sean Scully: Wall of Light."** Through Jan. 15. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Brice Marden: A Retrospective of Paintings and Drawings."** Through Jan. 15. ♦ **"Eija-Liisa Ahtila: The Wind."** The Finnish artist presents a video installation in which a woman's apartment is disrupted by gales. Through Jan. 29. ♦ **"Projects 83: Monika Sosnowska."** Sosnowska has torn a jagged gash between the muse-

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
FROM PAGE TO WALL

Annie Leibovitz, one of the most successful and skillful editorial photographers of the past four decades, has never been particularly good at translating her work from the printed page to the gallery wall. No matter how smashing her celebrity portraits may appear in *Vanity Fair* or *Vogue*, they tend to look merely clever in exhibition, at once overblown and oddly deflated. In the Brooklyn Museum's "A Photographer's Life, 1990-2005," this old problem is compounded by new ones, nearly all of them involving the photographer's decision to combine her very public work with very private pictures, including images made in the course of her fifteen-year relationship with Susan Sontag. The result, against all odds, is her smartest and most engaging show to date—not flawless by any means (skip the room of massive landscapes), but far more interesting for the risks it takes. While hardly underplayed, the personal work is shrewdly scaled down, reproduced in black-and-white and at the size of family snapshots. Its modesty and intimacy put Demi Moore, Brad Pitt, Julian Schnabel, and the Bush Cabinet in perspective and open up a vein of feeling that had always seemed carefully sealed off.

—Vince Aletti

um's second and third levels, allowing viewers to peer up into a white-walled space; the floor below is littered with plasticky shards. As an art work, "The Hole" is more a one-liner than a revolutionary gesture, but it's still fun to see Yoshio Taniguchi's precious über-modern temple punctured, just a tiny bit, for the sake of art. Through Nov. 27. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—Two bodies of work by the Italian artist (1899-1968) best known for his slashed canvases are presented in **"Lucio Fontana: Venice/New York."** Through Jan. 21. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Albers and Moholy-Nagy: From the Bauhaus to the New World."** Opens Nov. 2. ♦ **"Picasso and American Art."** Through Jan. 28. ♦ **Mark Grotjahn's** large-scale works in pencil toy with geometry and multiple vanishing points; he ventures into color with a pair of drawings in saturated reds and yellows that anchor the room. Through Jan. 7. ♦ Works by Edward Hopper fill the fifth floor, including "Nighthawks," on loan from the Art Institute of Chicago. Through Dec. 3. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Annie Leibovitz: A Photographer's Life, 1990-2005."** Through Jan. 21. ♦ **"Tigers of Wrath: Watercolors by Walton Ford."** Opens Nov. 3. ♦ **"Ron Mueck."** Opens Nov. 3. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—One recently discovered little predella painting made by Cimabue in about 1280, an age-dimmed Madonna enthroned, is reunited with another, the Frick's glittering "Flagellation of Christ," in the exhibition **"Cimabue and Early Italian Devotional Painting."** They are the only known small works by the legendary teacher of Giotto. How good was he? Very, as comparison with a selection of contemporaneous Florentine pictures proves. With sinuous line and kinetic figuration, Cimabue stages an eruption of something new in medieval motifs. Spidery fingers not only gesture, they work. A torturer grasps Christ's hip to gain leverage for a backhand blow with a whip. The Saviour's calm gaze tell us how he suffers and what, sublimely, he knows. Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804): A New Testament."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"Italia! Muse to American Artists."** Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Luminist Horizons: The Art and Collection of James A. Suydam."** Through Dec. 31. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

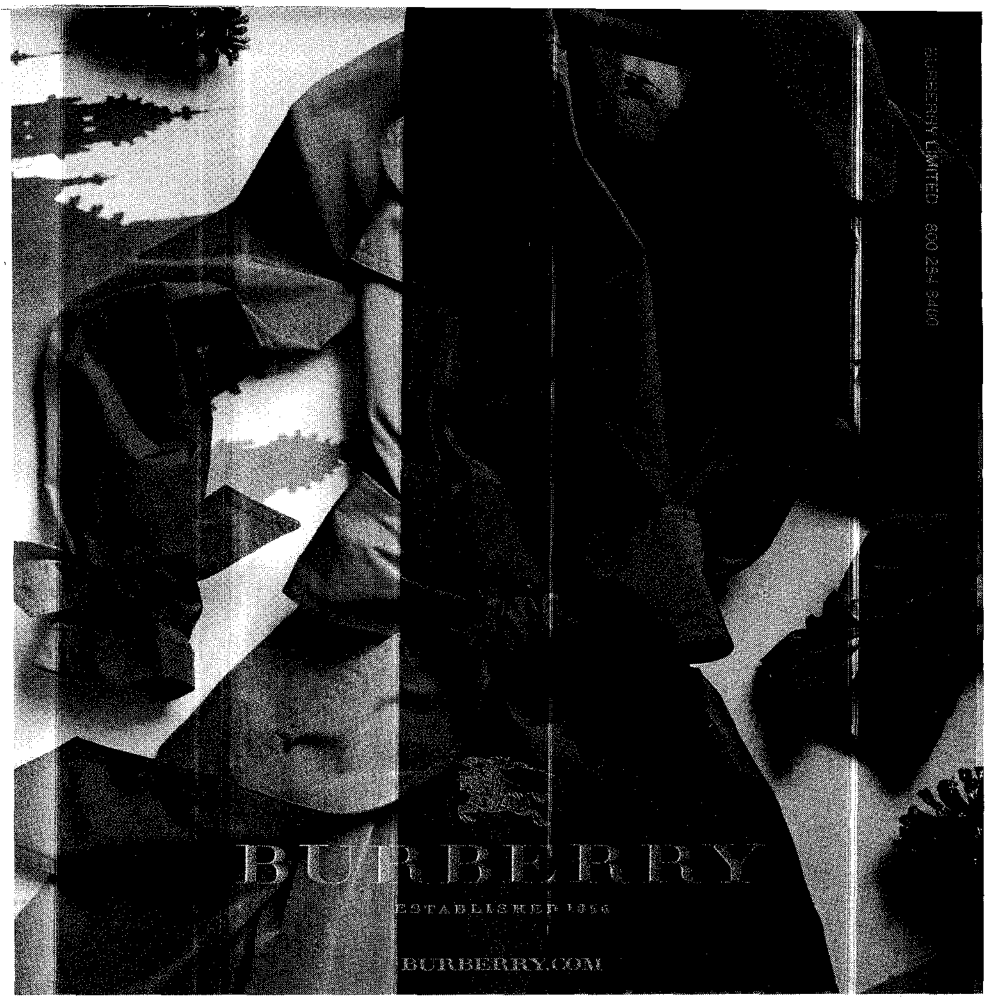
NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Josef Hoffmann: Interiors, 1902-1913."** Opens Nov. 2. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

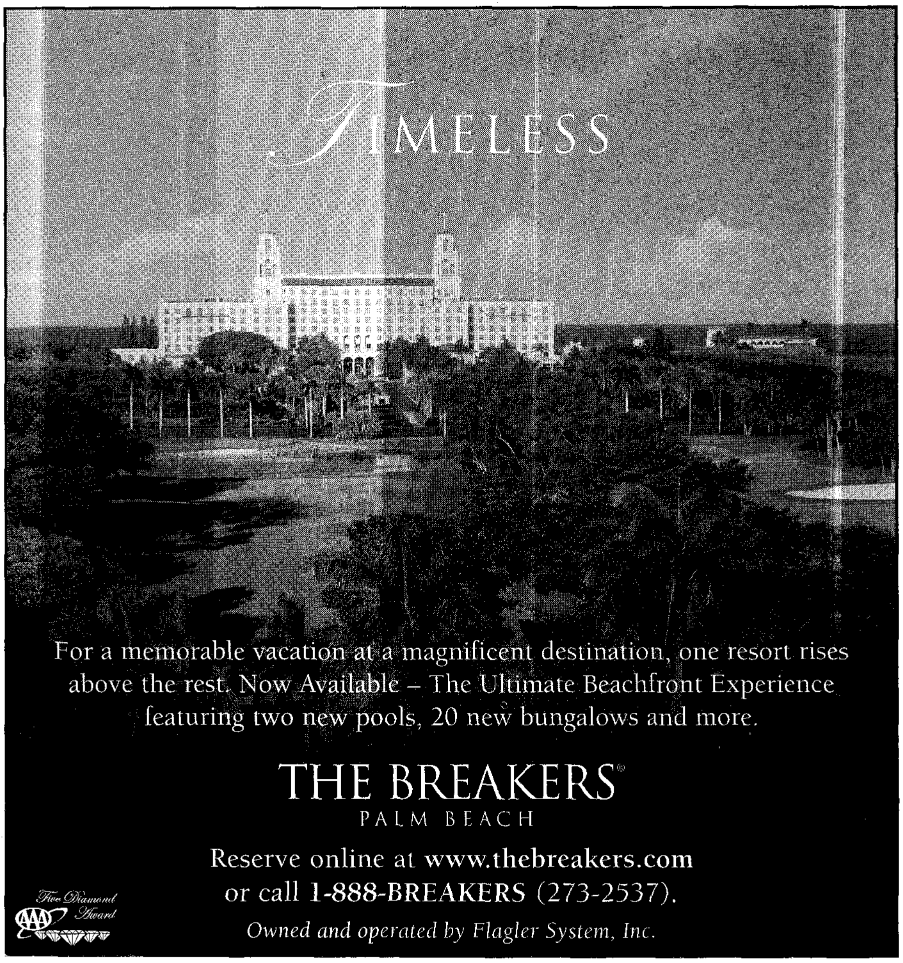
GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

STEPHEN VITIELLO
A recently discovered stand of thousand-year-old cypress trees in Virginia occasions Vitiello's multichannel sound piece, which was recorded in the forest at early evening. Sitting on a bench in the sterile gallery, faced only by a bank of speakers, one has to close one's eyes to get the primeval feeling—running water, humming insects, and other night sounds are identifiable, but it's hard to be sure they're natural, not virtual. (This might be the point, since discovery is usually bad news for old growth.) The installation is rounded out by Vitiello's "speaker drawings," which

ANNIE LEIBOVITZ

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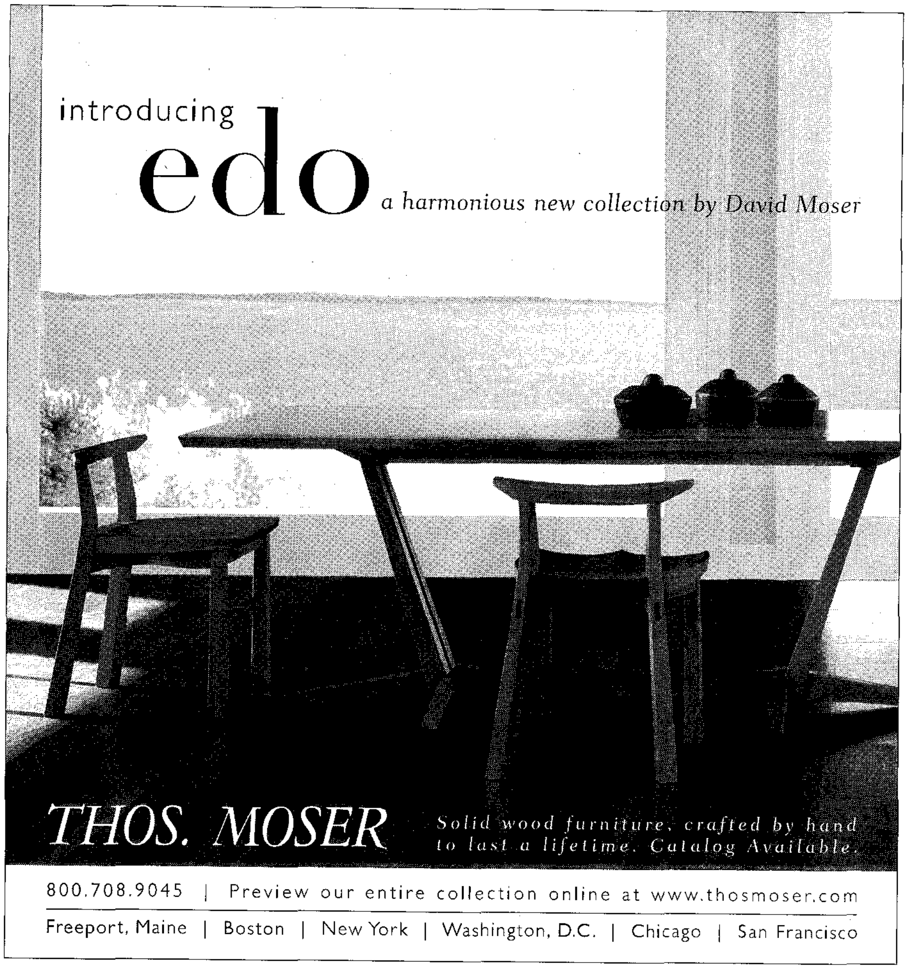
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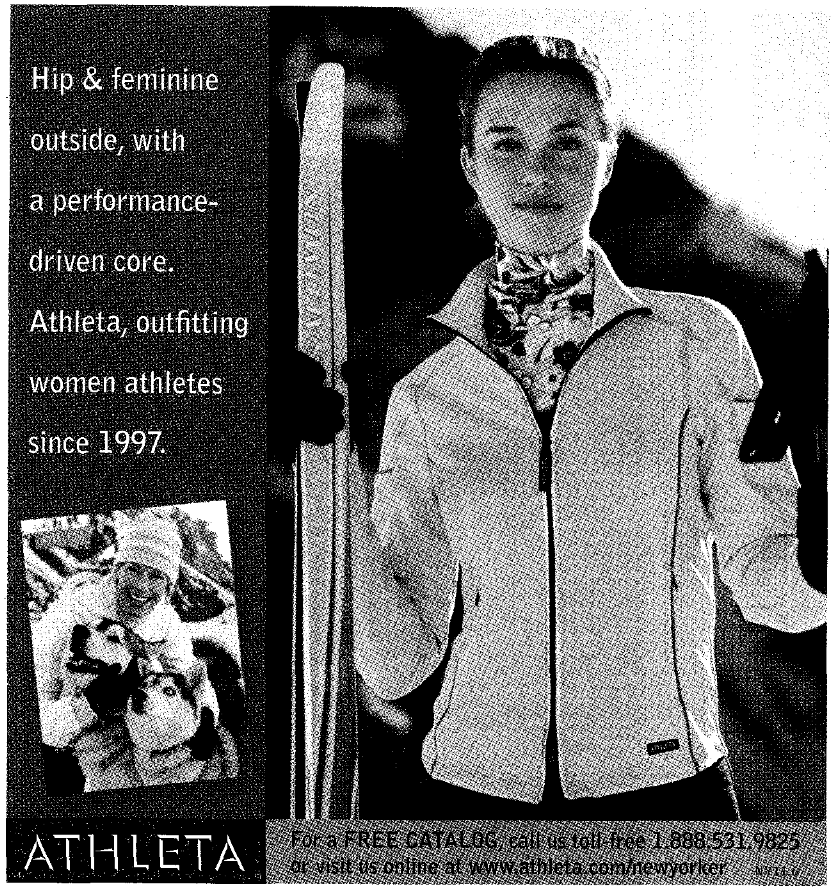
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he makes by expelling pigment from speakers via low-frequency tones. Through Nov. 3. (The Project, 37 W. 57th St. 212-688-4673.)

Short List

WALKER EVANS: UBS, 1285 Sixth Ave., at 51st St. 212-713-2885. Through Nov. 17. **ABELARDO MORELL:** Benrubi, 41 E. 57th St. 212-888-6007. Through Dec. 2. **SARAH MORRIS:** Lever House, 390 Park Ave., at 53rd St. For more information, see www.publicartfund.org. Through Dec. 3. **FRANZ ROH:** Ubu, 416 E. 59th St. 212-753-4444. Through Dec. 22. **NORBERT SCHWONTKOWSKI:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 212-744-7400. Through Nov. 22. **MICHAEL SPANO:** Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930. Through Nov. 4. **LISA YUSKAVAGE:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through Nov. 18.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

NEIL GOLDBERG
The rapt, expectant faces of ordinary people in Goldberg's video suggest immersion in love or prayer—that is, until you notice the rack of potato chips in the background: Goldberg's subjects are surveying options in a salad bar. Another suite of closeups registers rage, betrayal, and resignation on the faces of those who have, it turns out, just missed the train. Similar instants of everyday transcendence capture lilacs bobbing in a breeze, the artist's tweed-capped father breathing to fog a pocket mirror, and the amazing Pilar Rioja dancing flamenco while videographers film themselves filming her. Through Nov. 4. (Meltzer, 525-531 W. 26th St. 212-727-9330.)

ARTURO HERRERA
The Venezuelan-born whizbang of decorative abstraction has long fussed productively with goofily shaped supports. For this show, he confined himself to the rectangle: thirty-nine unframed paper sheets, more than eight feet high, that are overlaid with filigree cutouts of other sheets. The works are based on coloring-book illustrations, rarely legible, of a dwarf and an accordion-playing boy. Paint is brushed, dripped, sprayed, stained, puddled, and stencilled, in what may strike you as every color you ever saw. Their cumulative effect is like a jam session of massed trumpets and clarinets. You can dance to it. Through Nov. 25. (Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)

MICHAELA MEISE
The German artist Meise crowds her first New York show with sculpture, photography, video, and a panoply of references—from Benjamin Britten's song cycle "A Ceremony of Carols" to the African Burial Ground on lower Broadway to scenes of Twyla Tharp dancing in Central Park, lifted from the movie "Hair." A series of heart-shaped wood reliefs and other cute-minimal sculptures fall flat, but the viewer willing to invest some time in Meise's video will find a fragile, evocative connection rendered between the sacred Greek islands of Delos and Samos and Manhattan itself. Through Nov. 4. (Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770.)

CORINNE MERCADIER
The big, mostly black-and-white pictures in this French photographer's New York début have the mysterious, illogical quality of recorded dreams. Her technique, which involves rephotographing prints with a Polaroid SX-70 and enlarging them, adds a layer of grainy unreality to scenes that are already bizarre. Like Francesca Woodman, Mercadier works with solitary figures in ruined interiors or bare landscapes, but nearly all of her pictures also include things that have been thrown into the frame and appear suspended in midair. In the most haunting images, a length of fabric floats across the space like a scrawl of otherworldly automatic writing. Through Nov. 18. (Klotz, 511 W. 25th St. 212-741-4764.)

BARBARA MORGAN
This eye-opening survey of work made between 1921 and 1980 includes a number of the dynamic dance photographs that Morgan is famous for, but they're shown in the context of drawings, watercolors, and prints she produced alongside her signature work, as well as other photos in a nonrepresentational vein.

Movement animates and links many of these images, and a terrific salon-style installation tracks the invigorating spin, soar, and tumble of bodies and lines. Although Martha Graham remains the exhibition's driving force (a group of fifteen contact prints of Graham in performance provides a lovely coda), abstract photograms, photomontages, and light drawings prove that Morgan had her own way of leaping into the void. Through Nov. 11. (Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930.)

"CAGE NAM JUNE: A MULTIMEDIA FRIENDSHIP"
Once, when asked what he would most miss if he died, John Cage replied, "The conversation of Nam June Paik." The two met in 1958 at a composers' festival in Germany and instantly disliked each other's music, but the skepticism grew into a challenging and fertile friendship that lasted thirty-five years. Works by both are presented, including some lovely, simple prints made with aquatint and smoke by Cage and a short video interview with Paik, in which he reminisces about an infamous action in which he interrupted a performance by cutting Cage's necktie in half. Through Nov. 3. (Zone: Chelsea Center for the Arts, 601 W. 26th St. 212-255-2177.)

"DICE THROWN (WILL NEVER ANNUL CHANCE)"
If photography is undergoing an identity crisis, the twelve young neo-Conceptualists gathered here are only too happy to push it to the breaking point. Although several echo the medium's experimental avant-garde (Walead Beshty's gestural abstractions would not have been out of place in the Dada show), most of them subvert straight photography by teasing straight subject matter. Melanie Willhide enlarges the backs of old snapshots, Peter Coffin photographs open photo books, and Eileen Quinlan makes an especially elegant suite of Polaroids out of nothing but smoke and mirrors. Daniel Lefcourt's enormous still-life of tools shifts cunningly between super-realism and trompe l'oeil until viewers have no solid ground left to stand on. Through Nov. 11. (Bellwether, 134 Tenth Ave., at 19th St. 212-929-5959.)

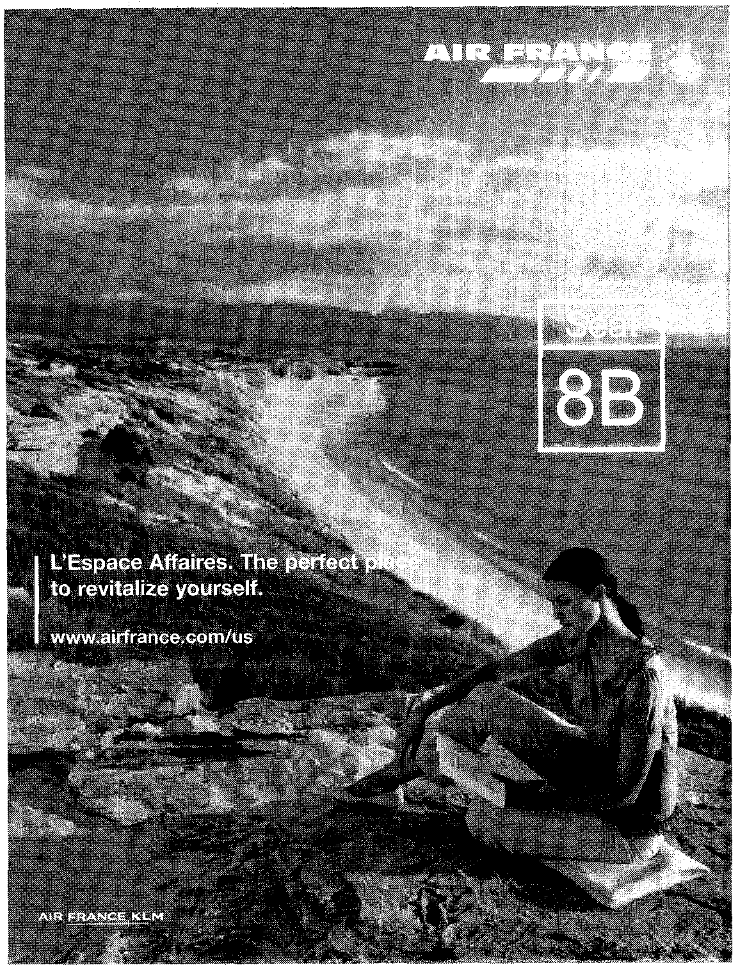
Short List

JILL GREENBERG: ClampArt, 521-531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020. Through Nov. 11. **KAREN KILIMNIK:** 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121. Through Nov. 4. **CHRISTIAN MARCLAY:** Cooper, 521 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through Nov. 4. **KEN PRICE:** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200. Through Nov. 4. **JOE SOLA:** Bespoke, 547 W. 27th St. 212-695-8201. Through Nov. 14. **LISA YUSKAVAGE:** Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Nov. 18.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

CORY ARCANGEL
Arcangel inaugurates Team's new space with works that range across the digital spectrum. "Colors" stretches Dennis Hopper's eponymous 1988 film to seven hundred and ninety-two hours, reshaping it as a slowly undulating striped video painting. For "Dazed and Confused," call-center operators in Bangalore, India, revoice the dialogue of Richard Linklater's 1993 ode to seventies slackerdom. Altered images and recordings by the Beatles, Guns N' Roses, and Bruce Springsteen further the thesis, revolutionary in some quarters but generally accepted by the tech-savvy population under the age of twenty-five, that pop culture—or any cultural product, really—is an interactive work in progress; there for the viewer to consume, hack, alter, or manipulate to his or her liking. Through Nov. 4. (Team, 83 Grand St. 212-279-9219.)

TAUBA AUERBACH
A young San Francisco-based artist (who also works as a sign painter) spins the everyday world of graphic signifiers into fodder for handsome geometrically abstract images. Here are paintings and drawings that parse the binary language of digital technology and explore the graphic possibilities of maritime flags, the Lord's Prayer (cut up and rearranged), the Ugaritic alphabet (written in cuneiform), and Morse code. Auerbach follows in the footsteps of another Deitch artist, Ryan McGinness—but, where McGinness has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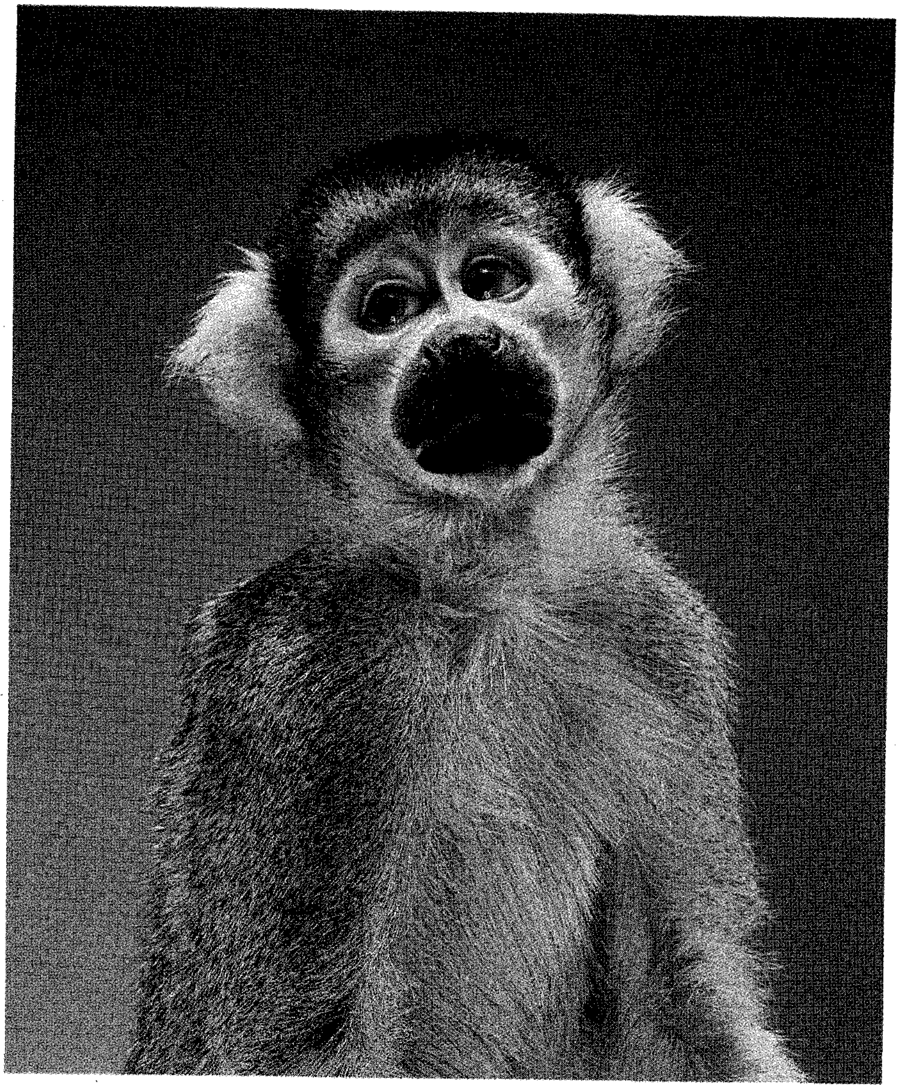

"Undecided" (2004), from Jill Greenberg's "Monkey Portraits" show, at ClampArt.

mostly shed the logos and references to specific graphic-art movements and developed his own floridly decorative style, Auerbach is still finding her way through the forest of signs. Through Nov. 4. (Deitch, 76 Grand St. 212-343-7300.)

LOUISE BOURGEOIS

If drawing is the new painting, then Bourgeois should be crowned doyenne of the movement. Here, we get a rare look at works on paper made early in her career, in the forties and fifties. Ranging from humorous doodles—smiley faces included—to undulating charcoal landscapes, these graphic compositions transport us deep into the artist's psyche, her uninhibited inventiveness, and her dark obsessions. Through Nov. 4. (Peter Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441.)

PHONG BUI

A double installation slips from naïve preciosity to high-modernist angularity while maintaining an affectionate skepticism about both. Called "A Hybrid Carnival for St. Exupéry Part IV," the endeavor does soar and joke like "The Little Prince." In the front room, an array of collages and assemblages suggest Klee or Gorky reimagined by a team of potheads and kindergartners. In the larger back room, a lyrical geometric three-part mural takes subtle advantage of architectural features like a pipe or a staircase to activate the room as a walk-in drawing. Through Nov. 4. (Wooster Arts Space, 147 Wooster St. 212-777-6338.)

DANCE

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

"Dark Elegies," Antony Tudor's ode to loss in all its forms—despair, solitude, anger, resignation—set to the heartbreaking songs of Mahler's "Kindertotenlieder," will be performed twice during A.B.T.'s final week at City Center. The simplicity and naturalness of the dancers' movements, combined with their plain attire, heighten the power of this piece, and put it in sharp contrast to Tharp's paean to energy "In the Upper Room," with which it shares a program on Thursday. Seven men, dancing with a lone ballerina, get to show off their technique—and their muscles—in Stanton Welch's "Clear," set to two Bach concerti. And Mark Morris's luminous ballet "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes" is not to be missed. Casts appear on the company's Web site. ♦ Nov. 1 at 8: "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes," "Clear," and "In the Upper Room." ♦ Nov. 2 at 7:30: "Symphonie Concertante," "Dark Elegies," and "In the Upper Room." ♦ Nov. 3 at 8: "Clear," "Afternoon of a Faun," Act III pas de deux from "Swan Lake," and "Fancy Free." ♦ Nov. 4 at 2: "Glow-Stop," "Meadow," and "The Green Table." ♦ Nov. 4 at 8: "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes," "Dark Elegies," and "Fancy Free." ♦ Nov. 5 at 2: "Clear," "Meadow," and "In the Upper Room." (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

MEREDITH MONK

"Impermanence," the singular artist's latest genre-defying creation, grew out of her experiences in a British hospice not long after the death of her longtime partner. The work begins with the voices of patients croaking out a melody left on a tape recorded by Monk's lost companion. Later, Monk and her expert ensemble of singers surround that melody with her signature vocalizations, working it into a lovely, subtly shifting chorale. Such transformations of simple materials are the magic of this episodic meditation on what's left behind. The songs, movement sequences, and film segments add up to a gentle celebration of idiosyncrasy—someone plays a bicycle's spokes; everyone dances like children. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Nov. 1-4 at 7:30 and Nov. 5 at 3.)

BALLET HISPANICO

Ballet Hispanico's artistic director, Tina Ramirez, can't seem to get enough of the Catalan modern-dance choreographer Ramón Oller, whose lyrical, highly physical, often iterative dances have become company staples. This week at the Joyce, Oller is represented by excerpts from three previous commissions, as well as a world première, "Corazón al-Andaluz," inspired by Washington Irving's "Tales of the Alhambra" and performed to a score with Islamic, Sephardic, and flamenco accents by Rosa Zaragoza and Luis Delgado. "Corazón" is performed in rotation with a condensed version of last season's "Palladium Nights," Willie Rosario's flashy ode to Latin jazz, and the "on two" mambo. (175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Nov. 1 at 7:30, Nov. 2-3 at 8, Nov. 4 at 2 and 8, and Nov. 5 at 2 and 7:30. Through Nov. 12.)

PAM TANOWITZ DANCE

The clear-sighted postmodernist expands her 2005 piece "Storage" to a suite of four interrelated dances—three of them choreographed to portentous music by Charles Wuorinen. Tanowitz's studious, deliberate dismantling of traditional balletic movements produces a stream of provocative, fresh juxtapositions. In one eerie section, a girl is propelled forward ineluctably, like a music-box dancer set loose in a fairy tale; in another, New York City Ballet's Elizabeth Walker performs a stripped-down solo en pointe. Tanowitz's love of counterpoint extends to the background; whenever they aren't dancing, the dancers hover onstage, making shapes that contrast with or echo those of the main performers. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Nov. 2-5 at 8:30.)

"PALLADIUM MEMORIES"

In May, the legendary Palladium Ballroom was successfully brought back to life in the glass-panelled Allen Room of Jazz at Lincoln Center with a battle of the bands between the remaining members of the great mambo orchestras of Machito and Tito Puente. Many great dancers were on hand, too, and Cuban Pete, seventy-nine, showed what it means to dance "inside" the music. This time, only Puente's musicians take the bandstand. The popular teachers Eddie Torres and Jimmy Anton will demonstrate their expertise, but, as before, much of the most exciting dancing will be found in an all too rare improvised interaction between the public and a topnotch live band. (60th St. and Broadway. 212-721-6500. Nov. 3 at 7:30.)

VALERY MIKHAILOVSKY'S SAINT PETERSBURG STATE MALE BALLET

Like its American counterpart Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, this all-male company specializes in presenting well-known numbers from the Russian classical-ballet repertory, such as "The Ocean and the Pearls" pas de trois from "The Little Humpbacked Horse" and the grand pas from "Paquita," in which the guys get up on pointe and do fouettés with the best of them. The effect is both comic and oddly compelling. Unlike other travesty troupes, this group also performs highly serious contemporary works made just for men. (Walt Whitman Theatre, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn. 631-727-0222. Nov. 4 at 7.)

ROSEANNE SPRADLIN DANCE

The dancers in Spradlin's disturbing "Survive Cycle" may be getting by, but modern life is taking its toll. Each begins with a case of the jitters that only gets worse as the dance goes on. When they push each other to the ground, over and over, the desperate intensity of their discontent swells. Theirs is a collapsing world, and they cut away at each other's clothing until the outfits break down into swatches of color. Meanwhile, the composer, Chris Peck, does similarly deconstructive work with the sounds of heavy-distortion electric guitar and the snip of scissors. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Nov. 7 at 7:30. Through Nov. 11.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
The return of the Zeffirelli production of **"Tosca"** is notable for the powerhouse casting of the roles of Tosca and Cavaradossi—the estimable Andrea Gruber and José Cura. James Morris, who has whittled his interpretation of the villain Scarpia down to a fine point, completes the fatal triangle; Nicola Luisotti conducts. (Nov. 1 and Nov. 7 at 8 and Nov. 4 at 1:30.) ♦ Juan Pons should be a reliably decent **"Rigoletto,"** but the excitement in this revival of Otto Schenk's archconservative production will come from the new Duke—Joseph Calleja, the honey-toned Maltese tenor, making his Met début. Other débutants include a new Gilda, Ekaterina Siurina, and the conductor, Friedrich Haider. (Nov. 2 and Nov. 6 at 8.) ♦ The Met brings back Zeffirelli's dense, overstaffed production of the uneven, bloody diptych that is **"Cavalleria Rusticana"** and **"Pagliacci."** In the first, Maria Guleghina provides some brilliant singing as the spurned lover, with the duelling suitors, Franco Farina and Ambrogio Maestri, appropriately inflamed; in the more fulfilling second opera, dazzling performances from the soprano Patricia Racette and the tenor Salvatore Licitra are aided by a surprise, celebrity Silvio—Dwayne Croft. Marco Armiliato leads his musicians with a firm but flexible hand. (Nov. 3 at 8.) ♦ Anthony Minghella's unmissable production of **"Madama Butterfly"** is awesome, deliberate, and artfully romantic—no surprise to fans of his films. With Cristina Gallardo-Domâs and Marcello Giordani; Asher Fisch. (Nov. 4 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
"Carmen," with a new cast that features Vanessa Cariddi (in the title role), Kerri Marcinko, Scott Piper, and Daesan No; Gary Thor Wedow conducts. (Nov. 1 at 7:30 and Nov. 3 at 8; all seats for the second performance are offered at a discount.) ♦ The new Jonathan Miller production of **"L'Elisir d'Amore,"** set in the American Southwest, with Anna Skibinsky, Erin Morley, John Tessier, Paulo Szot, and Jan Opalach; George Manahan. (Nov. 2 at 7:30.) ♦ James Robinson's English-language production of **"Hansel and Gretel"** sets Humperdinck's quasi-Wagnerian treatment of the grim Brothers Grimm tale in a Victorian-era Lower East Side, with Central Park serving as the wild forest. A number of winning young voices—including those of Jennifer Aylmer, Jennifer Rivera, and Jennifer Roderer—are featured in the revolving cast; Steven Mosteller. (Nov. 4-5 at 1:30 and Nov. 5 at 5:30.) ♦ Maestro Julius Rudel's return to City Opera's podium, after two and a half decades away, is not quite the triumph it could have been: this interpretation of Mozart's zesty **"Così Fan Tutte"** takes quite a while to perk up. The singers, however, soldier through Tim Albery's production to offer a persuasive reading of this perpetual puzzle of an opera, with standout performances from Sandra Piques Eddy (Dorabella), the baritone Kyle Pfortmiller (Guglielmo), and the dependable James Maddalena (Don Alfonso). (Nov. 4 at 8.) (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

"STEVE REICH @ 70": "THE CAVE"
In this hybrid of music theatre and documentary (created with his wife, the video artist Beryl Korot), Reich illuminates the roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict by giving musical form to the different layers of meaning and memory through which each group regards the sacred burial cave of Abraham and Sarah. Brad Lubman conducts the singers and instrumentalists of the Steve Reich Ensemble. (Gerald W. Lynch Theatre, John Jay College, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. 212-721-6500. Nov. 2-4 at 8.)

OPERA ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK: "DOM SÉBASTIEN"
The mezzo-soprano Vesselina Kasarova, in her only U.S. appearance of the season, and the young tenor Dmitry Korchak take the leading roles of Donizetti's obscure final opera, a sprawling historical fantasy set during the Crusades. Eve Queler, as always, conducts. (Carnegie Hall. 212-799-1982. Nov. 7 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

ORQUESTRA DE SÃO PAULO
One of South America's premier orchestras, conducted by John Neschling, begins a North American tour in style at the Metropolitan Museum, performing Tchaikovsky's "Rococo Variations" (with the cellist Antonio Meneses), Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2 in E Minor, and the "Abertura Concertante"

CLASSICAL NOTES
SONG SCENES

During the eighteenth century, two instruments—the violin and the soprano voice—discovered their capacity for virtuosity. But the violin's greatest moment arrived later, courtesy of Nicolò Paganini, the Italian titan whose finest compositions combine the lyrical flights of bel canto with astounding technical feats. His popular Violin Concerto No. 1 in D Major (1816) hardly lacks for recordings, but a new Deutsche Grammophon release from Hilary Hahn (with Eiji Oue conducting the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra) is distinctive, not only for a graceful rendition of the Paganini but also for the inclusion of the unjustly neglected Violin Concerto No. 8 in A Minor by Louis Spohr, another composer-violinist, who adapted the sounds and sensibilities of opera in a more refined manner.

Paganini's concerto respects the usual three-movement form, but Spohr's, written in the same year, is shaped according to its subtitle: "In the Form of a Vocal Scene." Here are recitatives, a cavatina, a cabaletta, and a finale, right out of a Rossini opera—and delivered with a comparable level of invention. Hahn's technically formidable playing has never emphasized dramatic contrasts, but she clearly relishes the challenge of bringing this ingeniously fashioned piece to light.

The Hungarian composer György Kurtág also enjoys a hyphenated profession, that of composer-teacher. Among his adoring students from Budapest is the exuberant violinist András Keller, for whom he wrote "Kafka Fragments" (1985-86), a sequence of settings for soprano and violin, which Keller has recorded on ECM with the radiant soprano Juliane Banse. This compelling piece slowly expands like a night-blooming rose, giving the tortured texts, extracted from the writer's letters and journals, a fragrance that the printed word alone cannot convey. For relief, listeners might want to turn to another ECM release, "To Be Sung on the Water," by the violinist Michelle Makarski. The warmhearted title piece, by the California composer Donald Crockett (performed with the violist Ronald Copes), sounds like Schoenberg's "Summer Morning by a Lake" recomposed by Aaron Copland.

—*Russell Platt*

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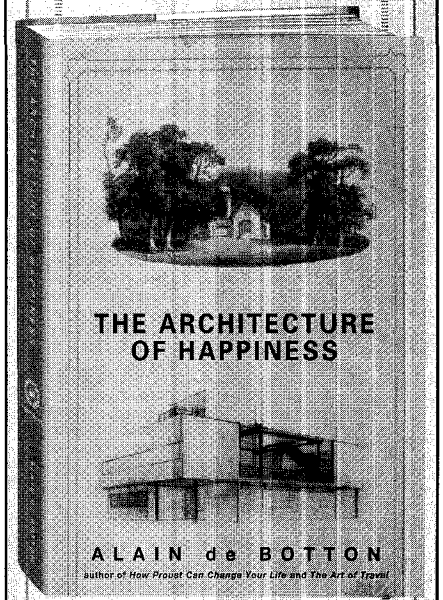

THE ARCHITECTURE OF HAPPINESS
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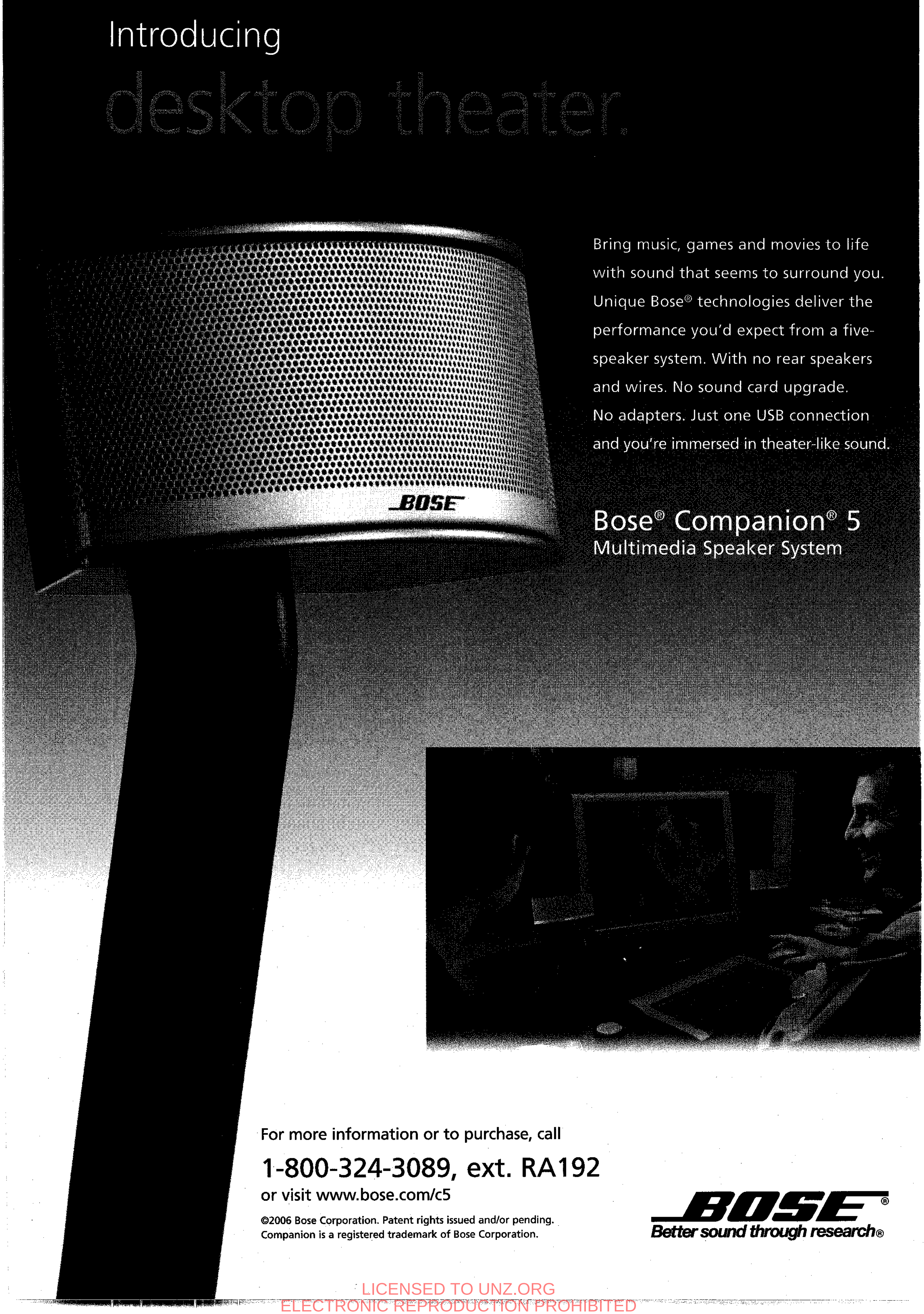

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(1942), by the notable Brazilian composer Mozart Camargo Guarnieri. (212-570-3949. Nov. 1 at 8.)

BAVARIAN RADIO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Southern Germany's finest orchestra comes to Carnegie Hall with its chief conductor, Mariss Jansons, a musician of extraordinary discipline and lean intensity. Nov. 3 at 8: There could hardly be a better way to begin the series than to engage the luminous Finnish soprano Karita Mattila, who will sing Strauss's "Four Last Songs" in a concert that begins with Shostakovich's Symphony No. 6 and concludes with the "Rosenkavalier" Suite. ♦ Nov. 4 at 8: The magnetic Gidon Kremer joins the orchestra in Bartók's rarely performed Violin Concerto No. 1, in a performance bookended by Wagner's "Tannhäuser" Overture and Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. ♦ Nov. 5 at 8: Rolf Liebermann's "Furioso" is a prelude to works by Beethoven (the First Piano Concerto, with Lang Lang) and Sibelius (the Second Symphony). (212-247-7800.)

PAULA ROBISON: "THE GREAT VIVALDI"
The captivating flutist, with chamber orchestra, begins her fifth year of programs devoted to the concertos (including the Flute Concerto in E-Flat Major, "Tempesta di Mare") of the red-haired master of Venice, held amid the grandeur of the Temple of Dendur. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Nov. 4 at 7.)

RECITALS

MAKOR MUSIC
The 92nd Street Y's café, catering to a stylish young audience, hosts two concerts in an informal setting. Nov. 1 at 7: The groundbreaking Argento Chamber Ensemble offers "American Radicals," featuring works by Edmund Campion and Earl Kim ("Exercises en Route," a haunting Beckett cycle, with the soprano Daisy Press). ♦ Nov. 1 at 9: The young violinist Jonathan Gandelsman—who recently performed with Yo-Yo Ma and the New York Philharmonic—joins the deft pianist Steven Beck in music by Biber, Stravinsky (the Divertimento from "The Fairy's Kiss"), and Brahms (the Sonata No. 1 in G Major). (Steinhardt Building, 35 W. 67th St. To reserve tickets, visit www.92y.org.)

GIDON KREMER AND KRYSTIAN ZIMERMAN
Two commanding artists—on violin and piano, respectively—keep things simple, offering the three violin sonatas of Johannes Brahms. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Nov. 1 at 8.)

FIREWORKS: "CARTOON"
Carl Stalling, the Warner Bros. maestro who scored the Looney Tunes antics of Bugs and Daffy, gets a chance to shine courtesy of the zany young rock-and-jazz-influenced group, which will perform some choice cuts along with their corresponding visuals. Also with cartoon-inspired works by John Zorn and John Adams. (Thalia Theatre, Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Nov. 2 at 7:30.)

MUSICA ANTIQUA KÖLN
One of Europe's legendary early-music groups stops at Zankel Hall for a farewell appearance—without its director, Reinhard Goebel, who is disbanding the ensemble because of health problems. They perform works by J. S. Bach, Heinrich Bach, Heinichen, Telemann, and others, with the contralto Marijana Mijanovic as guest. (212-247-7800. Nov. 2 at 7:30.)

BARGEMUSIC
The pianist Doris Stevenson is featured in two programs at the floating chamber-music series. Nov. 2-3 at 7:30: Leslie Parnas, dean of New York cellists and one of the founding members of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, performs the sonatas for cello and piano by Britten, Chopin, and Shostakovich. ♦ Nov. 4 at 7:30 and Nov. 5 at 4: Jeffrey Solow takes up Barber's seldom heard Sonata for Cello and Piano, in a program (with Stevenson, and the violinist Mark Peskanov) that also includes Brahms's beloved Violin Sonata No. 1 in G Major and Mendelssohn's Piano Trio in C Minor. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

JOSHUA HOPKINS AND J. J. PENNA
The exceptional young baritone and his accompanist offer songs by Schubert, Schumann, and Ravel ("Don Quichotte à Dulcinée") at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall. (212-247-7800. Nov. 3 at 7:30.)

MILLER THEATRE: "JEWISH MUSICIANS AT THE TUDOR COURT"
According to the latest research, the majority of Henry VIII's expert musicians were transplanted Spanish and Portuguese Jews. Fretwork, the sublime English consort of viols, performs works by members of the Bassano and Lupo families, along with music by Isaac and Gough. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Nov. 4 at 8.)

YEFIM BRONFMAN, GIL SHAHAM, AND LYNN HARRELL
Three instrumental masters, downshifting their considerable energies to chamber-music level, offer piano trios by Mozart, Shostakovich, and Schubert (No. 2 in E-Flat Major). (212-247-7800. Nov. 5 at 2.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "THROUGH BRAHMS"
In the second of two concerts, the players of the Society offer a selection of works both by Brahms and by such neo-Brahmsian composers as Webern, Leon Kirchner (the New York première of "For the Left Hand," offered by a distinguished guest, the pianist Gary Graffman), and Korngold (the ebullient Suite for Two Violins, Cello, and Piano Left Hand). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. Nov. 5 at 5 and Nov. 7 at 7:30.)

EMMANUEL CEYSSON
The dashing French harpist makes his New York début under the aegis of Young Concert Artists, which (in a program of works by Bach, Fauré, and Ravel) pairs him with such musicians as the flutist Marya Martin and the Jupiter String Quartet. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Nov. 6 at 7:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

BORAT
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Nov. 3. (In wide release.)

COMMUNE
A documentary by Jonathan Berman about the Black Bear Ranch commune, in California, and its residents' difficulties living together. Opening Nov. 3. (Cinema Village.)

FLUSHED AWAY
Sam Fell and David Bowers directed this CGI film about a mouse in the sewers of London. With the voices of Hugh Jackman and Kate Winslet. Opening Nov. 3. (In wide release.)

ROMÁNTICO
A documentary, directed by Mark Becker, about the Mexican musician Carmelo Muñiz Sánchez. Opening Nov. 1. (IFC Center.)

THE SANTA CLAUSE 3: THE ESCAPE CLAUSE
In this comedy, Santa (Tim Allen) must prevent Jack Frost (Martin Short) from seizing control of the North Pole. Directed by Michael Lembeck. Opening Nov. 3. (In wide release.)

UNKNOWN
Simon Brand directed this thriller, about five amnesiacs locked in a warehouse. Starring Jim Caviezel and Greg Kinnear. Opening Nov. 3. (IFC Center and 62nd & Broadway.)

VOLVER
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. In Spanish. Opening Nov. 3. (In wide release.)

WONDROUS OBLIVION
A comic drama, directed by Paul Morrison, about a Jewish boy in London in the nineteen-sixties who learns to play cricket from his Jamaican neighbor. Opening Nov. 3. (Quad Cinema.)

NOW PLAYING

ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN
Universal revitalized its baggy-pants franchise with this amiable monster mash. The saturnine Abbott and the ever-mugging Costello show vaudevillian panache as baggage handlers who have the mis-

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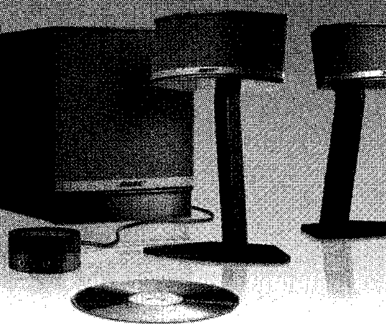

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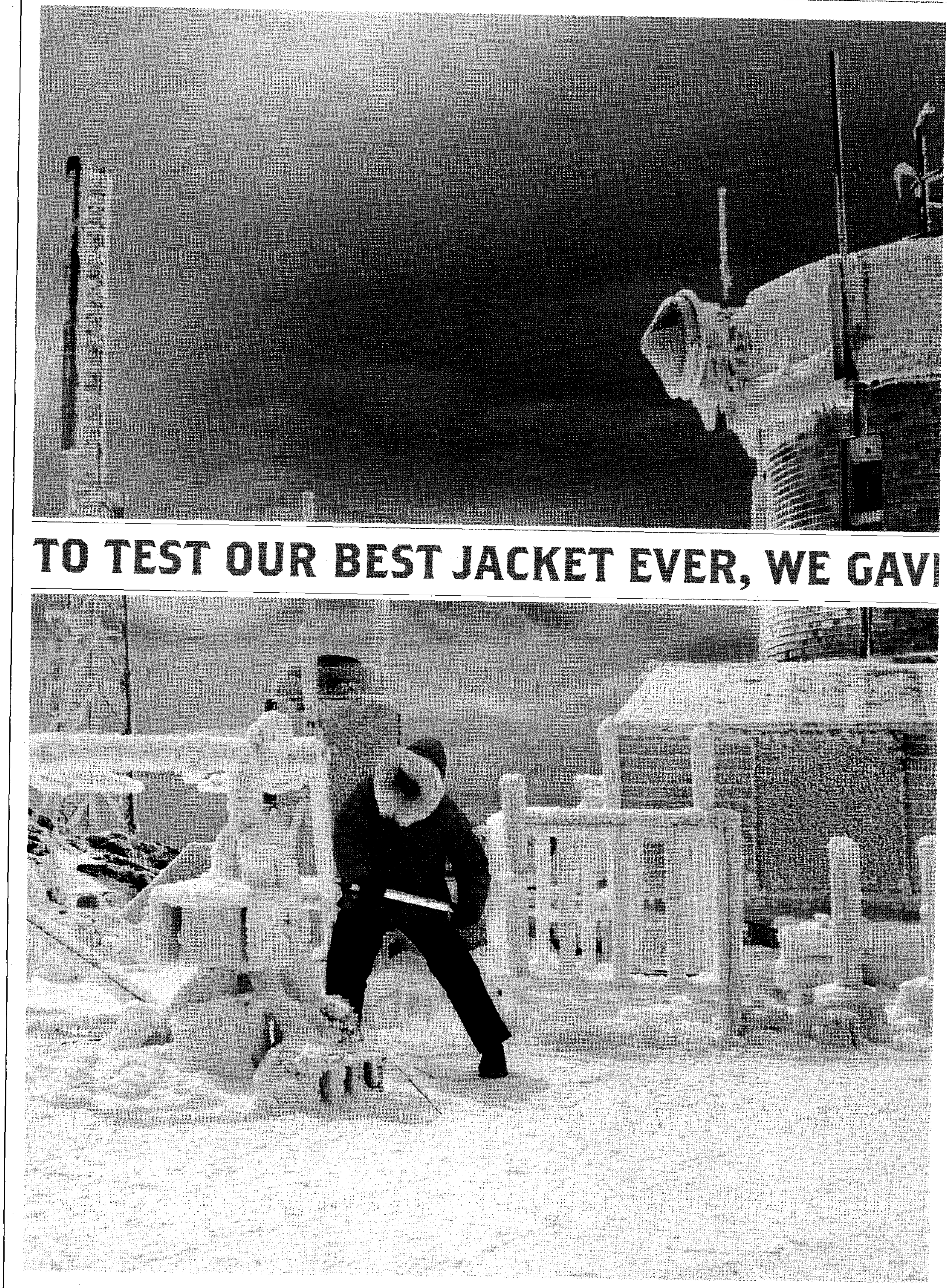
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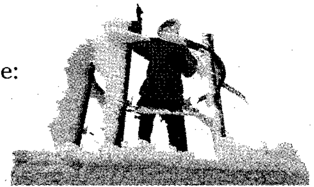

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
TWO RODE TOGETHER

Danièle Huillet died on October 9, in France, at age seventy. Her name may be unfamiliar to many younger moviegoers, but the films that she made with her husband, Jean-Marie Straub (who survives her), were art-house mainstays in the nineteen-sixties and seventies. Their first feature, "Not Reconciled," from 1965, based on Heinrich Böll's "Billiards at Half-Past Nine," accused Germany of a violent militarism that both preceded and outlived Nazism; in response, it proposed civil violence—and did so with an austere, fragmented aesthetic as radical as its politics. After that, Straub and Huillet created a remarkable body of morally and intellectually challenging work, but American audiences grew more conservative and programmers more cautious. The New York Film Festival has shown only four of their feature films in the last thirty years, and such major works as "Antigone," from 1992, a hieratic adaptation of Sophocles as rousing as a John Ford Western, remain unreleased here. May the films of Straub and Huillet be seen, and may Straub have the strength to go on alone.

—*Richard Brody*

RICCARDO VECCHIO

fortune to process the coffins of Count Dracula (Bela Lugosi) and Frankenstein's Monster (Glenn Strange). Add the tortured Wolf Man of Lon Chaney, Jr., and you've got a snug-fitting context for Costello's infantile frenzies. The heavies maintain their deadpans and get the biggest laughs. (Strange's Monster does a horrified double take at his first sight of Costello.) The last shot features Vincent Price as the voice of the Invisible Man, a come-on for future—and inferior—comedies of terrors.—*Michael Sragow* (Sunshine Cinema; Nov. 3-4.)

BABEL
Alejandro González Iñárritu creates savagely beautiful and heartbreaking images, he gets fearless performances out of his actors, he edits with the sharpest razor inside any computer in Hollywood, and he also abuses his audience with a humorless fatalism and a piling up of calamities that border on the ludicrous. "Babel" is set in Morocco, Tokyo, and both Southern California and northern Mexico. The movie has three stories—all touching on relationships between parents and children—which have been arbitrarily linked together by the will of the director and his collaborator, the screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga. Their theme is the pathos of ignorance. All over the world, terrible things are happening, and we cannot know them or feel them, but an eagle-eyed artist, as he spans the globe, can connect us. As a mood, this globalized empathy is a noble enterprise. As a method of constructing a movie, it's hopeless. With Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett as a couple that gets in trouble in Morocco, Adriana Barraza as their housekeeper and nanny back home with the kids in San Diego, and Rinko Kikuchi as a teen-age girl in Tokyo desperate for the embrace of a man. In French, English, Spanish, Japanese, Berber, and Arabic.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 10/30/06.) (In wide release.)

THE BRIDGE
Eric Steel's documentary, about the allure of the Golden Gate Bridge to people who are considering suicide, was inspired by "Jumpers," an article by Tad Friend that appeared in this magazine. Steel centers his film on shots of people jumping from the bridge and hitting the water with terrible force. These images of death are grotesquely, irresistibly fascinating; their poetic, vaguely unreal gracefulness contrasts poignantly with the despair they imply. But Steel does not have the courage of his aggressive voyeurism: the jumpers' absolute confrontation with the void is mollified by the director's long, banal interviews with their families, all of whom have touching but utterly unenlightening stories. The two noteworthy interviewees are survivors of suicide attempts, who give voice to thoughts and experiences of a singular dark mystery. But, over all, Steel's sentimental approach betrays and trivializes what is awful, extraordinary, and profound in the subject.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

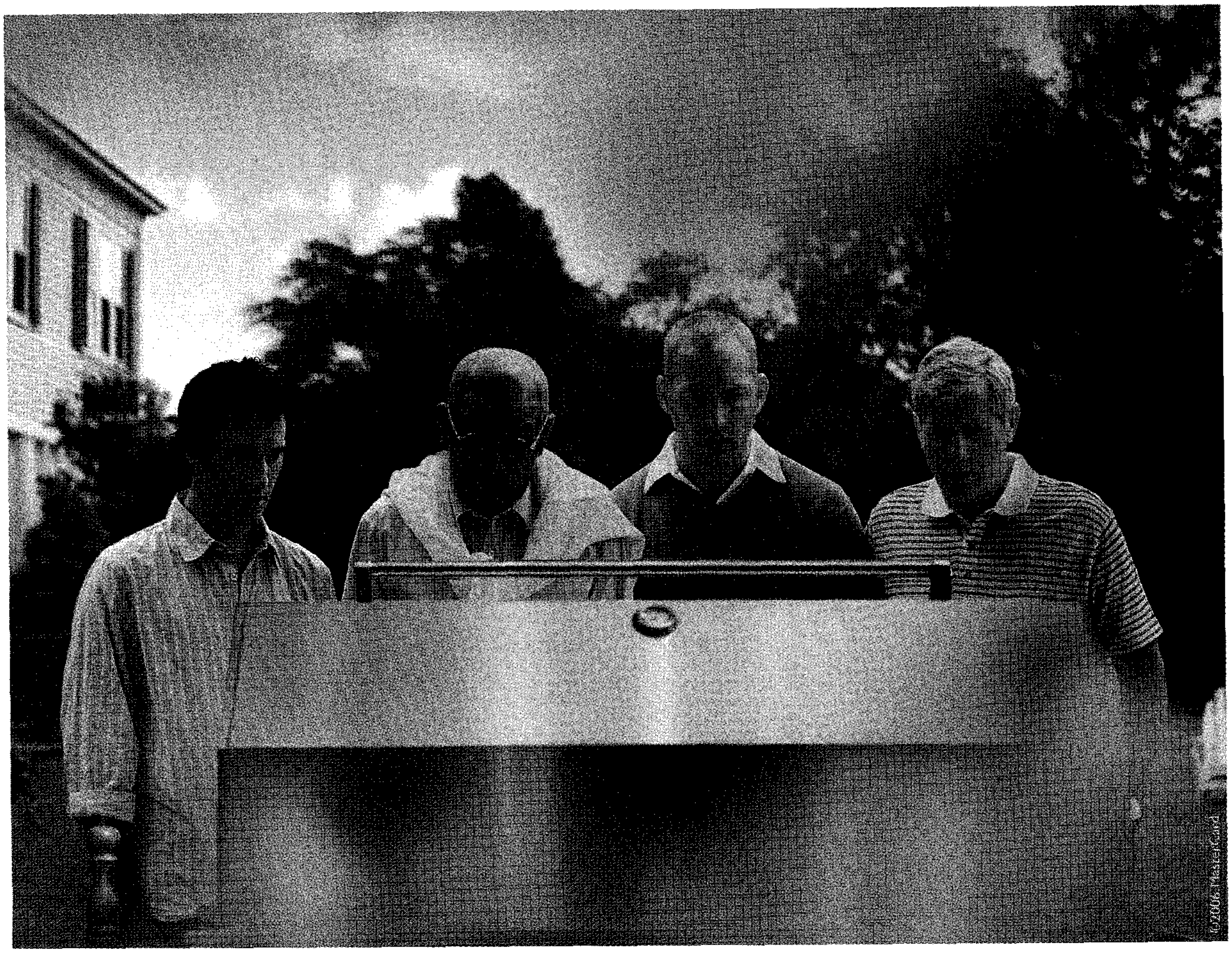
CLIMATES
The Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan daringly casts himself and his wife, Ebru Ceylan, in the lead roles of this poignant yet hard-edged modernist melodrama. During a beachside summer vacation, Isa, a struggling university lecturer, senses that his marriage to Bahar, a television art director, is falling apart, and, at his suggestion, they separate. He drifts through life in cosmopolitan, artistic Istanbul until he learns that Bahar has left town to work on a film in Turkey's rural, tradition-bound East and takes off to find her. Ceylan's long takes and brooding closeups capture the faces, gestures, and longings of Istanbul's aging bourgeois bohemians, as well as the moody nuances of actual and emotional weather—the ice storm brewing between Isa and Bahar at a balmy resort, the passionate heat of lovers during a blizzard. Shifting effortlessly between his characters' outer and inner realities with a novelist's omniscient aplomb, he nonetheless stays resolutely outside their motives in the film's most dangerous scene, a sexual conquest that appears to be rape. Paradoxically, the film's troubling ambiguities are among its virtues: under the guise of the universal theme of love and its mysteries, Ceylan offers a glimpse of harsh and unresolved local particulars. In Turkish.—*R.B.* (Film Forum.)

DEATH OF A PRESIDENT
A "Frontline"-style investigation of the fictional assassination of George W. Bush, written and directed by Gabriel Range. The movie blends real footage of various Bush speeches with scenes in which unfamiliar actors discuss the search for the assassin and the political climate of the country before and after the killing. Some of the news footage is convincingly staged, but many of the bogus interview segments, particularly those dealing with terrorism and the Patriot Act, feel contrived. The fake docudrama is meant to be a hot-button piece of speculative fiction, but the film's lack of irony or, for that matter, any serious introspection has the dulling, manufactured quality of cheap procedural storytelling.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

THE DEPARTED
This merrily vicious and violent Martin Scorsese film about cops and gangsters in Boston will never haunt your sleep, as "Taxi Driver" and "Raging Bull" do, but it will keep you excited and amused for well over two hours. A South Boston mobster (Jack Nicholson) recruits a young neighborhood kid and later places him, as a grownup (played by Matt Damon), in the Massachusetts State Police; the police, in turn, place their own undercover guy (Leonardo DiCaprio) in the crime boss's outfit. It's a double-mole story in which the two moles, in the end, wind up hunting each other. "The Departed" is a remake of the Hong Kong thriller "Infernal Affairs," directed by Andrew Lau and Alan Mak, and it has the speed and volatility of a Hong Kong movie. But Scorsese and the screenwriter, William Monahan, have added weight to the story by digging deep into urban tribal lore—the memories of loyalty and betrayal going back decades, the nasty old jokes, the bullying insults and invective. Nicholson doesn't seem to take the movie very seriously—he has a ball singing Irish ditties and making rat faces and holding up severed hands—but everyone else is both disciplined and highly adept at delivering the foulmouthed idiom. With Martin Sheen, Mark Wahlberg, and Alec Baldwin as cops, and Vera Farmiga as a police psychiatrist who is attracted to both young men.—*D.D.* (10/16/06) (In wide release.)

51 BIRCH STREET
In this infuriating yet fascinating documentary, the filmmaker Doug Block discovers secrets about his parents' lives yet seems naïvely irritated that they should have had any. Three months after Block's mother suddenly died, his father announced that he would marry a woman who had been his secretary in the nineteen-sixties and would move to Florida to be with her. Clearing out the family house in Port Washington, Long Island, Block found three decades' worth of his mother's diaries, which confirmed his new suspicions about his parents' marriage, though in surprising ways. He brings together videotaped interviews with his parents, his father's new wife, their friends, and other relatives to fill in a portrait that he had hitherto seen only in vague outlines. One wants to tell Block to get over it, and yet, as the film shows, touchingly, he can't: as Block haltingly asks his father intimate questions while enduring his stern, judgmental gaze, the viewer relives with him the drama of the eternal child who can't see past his parents' authority to their humanity.—*R.B.* (Cinema Village.)

FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS
Clint Eastwood's ironic epic about the battle of Iwo Jima and its strange aftermath has a fine, sensitive temperament but lacks an emotional payoff. Of the six men who raised the flag on Mt. Suribachi, and who became the anonymous subjects of the most famous photograph of the war, three survived the battle to be called home and paraded around the country as salesmen-heroes in a national War Bond tour. Obsessed with their dead friends, these ordinary guys—John Bradley (Ryan Phillippe), Rene Gagnon (Jesse Bradford), and Ira Hayes (Adam Beach)—faced their public role with varying degrees of pride, nausea, and guilt. The movie has been framed as a search for the truth, yet there is nothing startling, and little that is hidden, to expose. The men were embarrassed by the public fawning over them as heroes,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but they also raised a lot of money at a crucial time in the war. The movie is most impressive in its sombre battle scenes, which were mostly shot on a desolate strip of Iceland where the black sand has the same grim look as Iwo Jima's mangled turf. Eastwood and the cinematographer Tom Stern drained all the color out of the shots except for the thick, red stains of blood.—*D.D.* (10/30/06) (In wide release.)

INFAMOUS

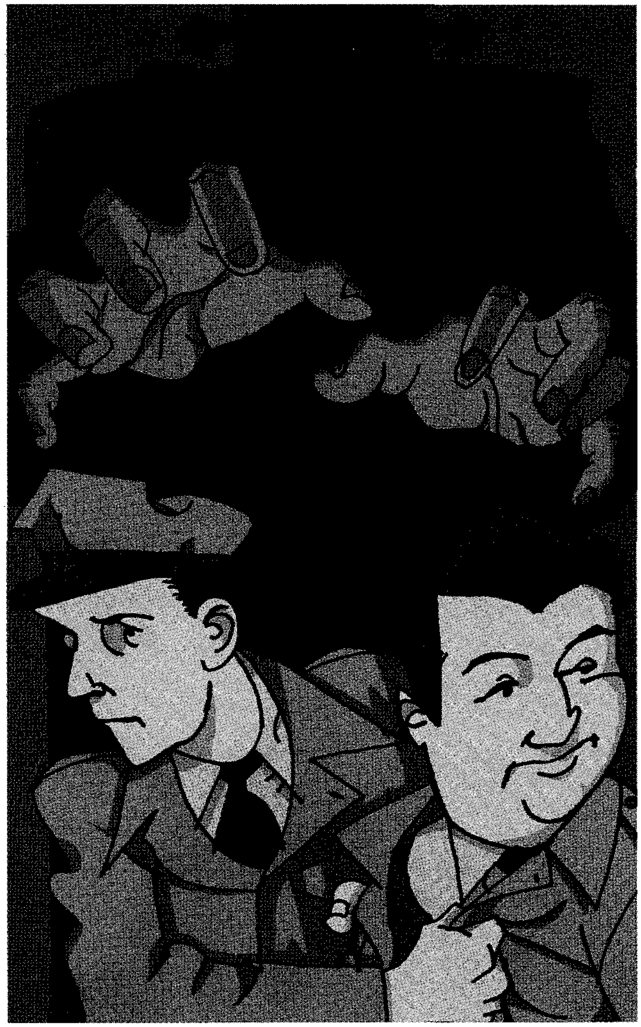
Douglas McGrath follows much the same path that was taken by last year's "Capote." Each film is not just about Truman Capote but, more specifically, about the murders in Kansas that led him to write "In Cold Blood" and, in so doing, to breach the border between fiction and reporting. The new movie is more acute on the temptations offered by that process; we see Capote (Toby Jones) writing down different versions of what an interviewee said, to see which sounds the smoothest. Jones is the living image of Capote, catching his fluting tones and the small man's Napoleonic need to fill a room. McGrath tracks him from a gold-lit, gossiping New York to the bloodstains of the Clutter household; and so to the gallows, and then back to New York, which suddenly, to Capote and to us, seems like far less fun. (Hence the crooning, sad-sweet cameo from Gwyneth Paltrow that runs over the opening credits.) With Sandra Bullock as Nelle Harper Lee, Jeff Daniels as the detective, Daniel Craig as one of the killers, and, scariest of all, Juliet Stevenson as Diana Vreeland.—*Anthony Lane* (10/23/06) (In wide release.)

LITTLE CHILDREN

A disappointed young mother (Kate Winslet) who has given up graduate school for a lousy marriage in the suburbs starts an affair with a former golden-boy college jock (Patrick Wilson), who is also married but stranded in adulthood. There's an element of garden-variety suspense in Todd Field's new movie, which he adapted with Tom Perrotta from Perrotta's novel—will the lovers run away together? But the movie is about a lot more. In a community devoted to the protection of children, a convicted sex offender (Jackie Earle Haley) shows up. The consternation he creates is so extreme that it seems the filmmakers might be suggesting a metaphor for the indeterminate but all-encompassing threat of terrorism; at the least, they are suggesting that both men and women are transferring their sexual frustrations and fears onto a pervert. The filmmakers' tone veers between a slightly mischievous irony and the most generous sympathy. The sex scenes are brief, naked, heated, startling. In all, it's a beautifully crafted piece of work that leaves you saddened by the mistakes that decent people make but also hopeful about the possibilities of renewal. With Noah Emmerich as a hysterical ex-cop and Jennifer Connelly as a loving wife more interested in her baby son than in her handsome but hapless husband.—*D.D.* (10/16/06) (In wide release.)

MARIE ANTOINETTE

If you want your movies to feel like watered silk—lustrous, precious, and thinner than skin—then Sofia Coppola's latest venture is for you. Kirsten Dunst, who even at her ditziest gives off a whiff of the narcoleptic, stars as Marie Antoinette, betrothed as an Austrian teen-ager to the clueless Dauphin of France (Jason Schwartzman). The sexual allure of her husband is on a par with the pink blancmanges on the dinner table, which is bad news for the royal succession but good for Coppola, who is left free to concentrate on desserts, hair styles, footwear, and other essentials of life. The result is less a character study than a pre-Revolutionary style catalogue, unembarrassed in its rage for the superficial. Somewhere beneath the frippery, there is a whisper of political threat: if the Queen really *was* as prodigal and heedless as this, no wonder the mobs were on the march. Toward the end, Coppola does indeed show Versailles under siege, but the onslaught is far too paltry, and too late, to hold any terrors. The cast is a mixed salad: Rip Torn as the randy old King, Asia Argento as his mistress, Judy Davis as a court harpy, and Marianne Faithfull, no less, as the mother of Marie Antoinette.—*A.L.* (10/23/06) (In wide release.)



"Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein," at Sunshine.

JASHAR AWAN

MOUCHETTE

In Robert Bresson's drama, from 1967, the hand-to-mouth harshness of rural life and the civilizing morality that softens it are the elements of ambient evil and divine indifference. Mouchette (Nadine Nortier), a pubescent girl, lives with her invalid mother and drunkard father and has sole care of her infant brother. She goes to school unkempt and uncouth, the object of the happy children's mockery. The feral, angry girl takes refuge in the woods and witnesses what she thinks is the murder of the gamekeeper by the local poacher, who takes her in, cooks up an alibi with her, and rapes her. But this predator without scruples is also her only peer, and she calls him her lover in the face of the moralizing townsfolk. In Bresson's hands, the meanderings of anecdote, derived from a novel by Georges Bernanos, take on the force of fate. The clatter of clogs on the pavement, the clink of a glass on a bar, and the shock of a hunter's gunshot all resound with the weight of higher judgments; the evil that one sanctimonious old woman claims to see in Mouchette's eyes is merely that of the world, unveiled. In French.—*R.B.* (Thalia Theatre; Nov. 5 and Nov. 7.)

THE PRESTIGE

The director Christopher Nolan skillfully toggles back and forth in time and perspective in this handsome tale of rival Victorian-age magicians. Borden (Christian Bale), a passionate, solemn illusionist, and Angier (Hugh Jackman), a well-to-do natural performer, begin under the tutelage of Cutter (the excellent Michael Caine) and go their separate ways after a magic trick involving Borden kills Angier's wife. The resulting bloody tug-of-war is couched in a more thoughtful notion: a true magician doesn't steal other people's tricks, he lives his art. Nolan's style of cross-cutting sustains suspense and intrigue, and there is a satisfying amount of both sleight of hand and its demystification. Yet in order to keep the viewer guessing about what, exactly, everyone is hiding, Nolan sacrifices any emotional revelation until the very end, when it may be too late.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

THE QUEEN

The new Stephen Frears film considers the deadlock, both grieving and comical, that followed the death of the Princess of Wales, in 1997. On the one hand, the Queen (Helen Mirren), believing it to be a private matter, stays and broods in Scotland with the Duke of Edinburgh (James Cromwell) and Prince Charles (Alex Jennings). On the other hand, Tony Blair (Michael Sheen), sensing a thirst for public mourning and thus a unique political opportunity, urges Her Majesty to return to London and face down the mob. And so she does; the crux of the drama comes when Mirren turns to the crowd outside Buckingham Palace and, with one smile, quashes any prospect of rebellion. The script, by Peter Morgan, relies largely on well-grounded speculation, and sticklers for accuracy will find the whole thing straying beyond belief; but, thanks to the careful performances, you subscribe all too readily to the movie's suggestion of a divided land—of a Britain caught between the trustworthy stiffness of tradition and a liberalism that is open not just to emotional honesty but to the coarseness of modern excess. With Helen McCrory as a distinctly unceremonious Cherie Blair.—*A.L.* (10/9/06) (In wide release.)

RED PSALM

The director Miklós Jancsó presents a peasant uprising in nineteenth-century Hungary as a swirling cultural jambalaya and an allegory for the 1956 anti-Soviet revolt. Tenant farmers bound by oppressive rents declare their fealty to socialist revolution, and do so in an oath sworn to God. After gendarmes burn their crops, the farmers burn a church, and soon find themselves the object of reprisals that are shocking in their swift, mechanized brutality. Jancsó brings the story to life with music and dance: the confrontations and the speech-making occur against a backdrop of fiddlers and folk songs, bare-breasted maidens and defiant chants, priestly dirges and ballads of lost love. In intricate, gliding long takes, he draws ribbon dancers and protesting marchers, candlelight processions and cavalry charges, into a hysterical profusion of contradictory, irreducible historical meaning. In the process, the clash between immovable age-old customs and irresistible political forces yields a spectacular, prophetic conflagration. In Hungarian. Released in 1972.—*R.B.* (Walter Reade Theatre; Nov. 5.)

RUNNING WITH SCISSORS

Ryan Murphy directs the film adaptation of Augusten Burroughs's best-selling memoir. Joseph Cross is aptly cast as Augusten, who is shown as a young boy emotionally tethered to his hy-

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Please read this summary of information about LUNESTA before you talk to your doctor or start using LUNESTA. It is not meant to take the place of your doctor's instructions. If you have any questions about LUNESTA tablets, be sure to ask your doctor or pharmacist.

LUNESTA is used to treat different types of sleep problems, such as difficulty in falling asleep, difficulty in maintaining sleep during the night, and waking up too early in the morning. Most people with insomnia have more than one of these problems. You should take LUNESTA immediately before going to bed because of the risk of falling.

LUNESTA belongs to a group of medicines known as "hypnotics" or, simply, sleep medicines. There are many different sleep medicines available to help people sleep better. Insomnia is often transient and intermittent. It usually requires treatment for only a short time, usually 7 to 10 days up to 2 weeks. If your insomnia does not improve after 7 to 10 days of treatment, see your doctor, because it may be a sign of an underlying condition. Some people have chronic sleep problems that may require more prolonged use of sleep medicine. However, you should not use these medicines for long periods without talking with your doctor about the risks and benefits of prolonged use.

Side Effects

All medicines have side effects. The most common side effects of sleep medicines are:

- Drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Lightheadedness
- Difficulty with coordination

Sleep medicines can make you sleepy during the day. How drowsy you feel depends upon how your body reacts to the medicine, which sleep medicine you are taking, and how large a dose your doctor has prescribed. Daytime drowsiness is best avoided by taking the lowest dose possible that will still help you sleep at night. Your doctor will work with you to find the dose of LUNESTA that is best for you. Some people taking LUNESTA have reported next-day sleepiness.

To manage these side effects while you are taking this medicine:

- When you first start taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, until you know whether the medicine will still have some effect on you the next day, use extreme care while doing anything that requires complete alertness, such as driving a car, operating machinery, or piloting an aircraft.
- Do not drink alcohol when you are taking LUNESTA or any sleep medicine. Alcohol can increase the side effects of LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine.
- Do not take any other medicines without asking your doctor first. This includes medicines you can buy without a prescription. Some medicines can cause drowsiness and are best avoided while taking LUNESTA.
- Always take the exact dose of LUNESTA prescribed by your doctor. Never change your dose without talking to your doctor first.

Special Concerns

There are some special problems that may occur while taking sleep medicines.

Memory Problems

Sleep medicines may cause a special type of memory loss or "amnesia." When this occurs, a person may not remember what has happened for several hours after taking the medicine. This is usually not a problem since most people fall asleep after taking the medicine. Memory loss can be a problem, however, when sleep medicines are taken while traveling, such as during an airplane flight and the person wakes up before the effect of the medicine is gone. This has been called "traveler's amnesia." Memory problems have been reported rarely by patients taking LUNESTA in clinical studies. In most cases, memory problems can be avoided if you take LUNESTA only when you are able to get a full night of sleep before you need to be active again. Be sure to talk to your doctor if you think you are having memory problems.

Tolerance

When sleep medicines are used every night for more than a few weeks, they may lose their effectiveness in helping you sleep. This is known as "tolerance." Development of tolerance to LUNESTA was not observed in a clinical study of 6 months' duration. Insomnia is often transient and intermittent, and prolonged use of sleep medicines is generally not necessary. Some people, though, have chronic sleep problems that may require more prolonged use of sleep medicine. If your sleep problems continue, consult your doctor, who will determine whether other measures are needed to overcome your sleep problems.

Dependence

Sleep medicines can cause dependence in some people, especially when these medicines are used regularly for longer than a few weeks or at high doses. Dependence is the need to continue taking a medicine because stopping it is unpleasant.

When people develop dependence, stopping the medicine suddenly may cause unpleasant symptoms (see *Withdrawal* below). They may find they have to keep taking the medicine either at the prescribed dose or at increasing doses just to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

All people taking sleep medicines have some risk of becoming dependent on the medicine. However, people who have been dependent on alcohol or other drugs in the past may have a higher chance of becoming addicted to sleep medicines. This possibility must be considered before using these medicines for more than a few weeks. If you have been addicted to alcohol or drugs in the past, it is important to tell your doctor before starting LUNESTA or any sleep medicine.

Withdrawal

Withdrawal symptoms may occur when sleep medicines are stopped suddenly after being used daily for a long time. In some cases, these symptoms can occur even if the medicine has been used for only a week or two. In mild cases, withdrawal symptoms may include unpleasant feelings. In more severe cases, abdominal and muscle cramps, vomiting, sweating, shakiness, and, rarely, seizures may occur. These more severe withdrawal symptoms are very uncommon. Although withdrawal symptoms have not been observed in the relatively limited controlled trials experience with LUNESTA, there is, nevertheless, the risk of such events in association with the use of any sleep medicine.

Another problem that may occur when sleep medicines are stopped is known as "rebound insomnia." This means that a person may have more trouble sleeping the first few nights after the medicine is stopped than before starting the medicine. If you should experience rebound insomnia, do not get discouraged. This problem usually goes away on its own after 1 or 2 nights.

If you have been taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine for more than 1 or 2 weeks, do not stop taking it on your own. Always follow your doctor's directions.

Changes In Behavior And Thinking

Some people using sleep medicines have experienced unusual changes in their thinking and/or behavior. These effects are not common. However, they have included:

- More outgoing or aggressive behavior than normal
- Confusion
- Strange behavior
- Agitation
- Hallucinations
- Worsening of depression
- Suicidal thoughts

How often these effects occur depends on several factors, such as a person's general health, the use of other medicines, and which sleep medicine is being used. Clinical experience with LUNESTA suggests that it is rarely associated with these behavior changes.

It is also important to realize it is rarely clear whether these behavior changes are caused by the medicine, are caused by an illness, or have occurred on their own. In fact, sleep problems that do not improve may be due to illnesses that were present before the medicine was used. If you or your family notice any changes in your behavior, or if you have any unusual or disturbing thoughts, call your doctor immediately.

Pregnancy And Breastfeeding

Sleep medicines may cause sedation or other potential effects in the unborn baby when used during the last weeks of pregnancy. Be sure to tell your doctor if you are pregnant, if you are planning to become pregnant, or if you become pregnant while taking LUNESTA.

In addition, a very small amount of LUNESTA may be present in breast milk after use of the medication. The effects of very small amounts of LUNESTA on an infant are not known; therefore, as with all other prescription sleep medicines, it is recommended that you not take LUNESTA if you are breastfeeding a baby.

Safe Use Of Sleep Medicines

To ensure the safe and effective use of LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, you should observe the following cautions:

1. LUNESTA is a prescription medicine and should be used ONLY as directed by your doctor. Follow your doctor's instructions about how to take, when to take, and how long to take LUNESTA.
2. Never use LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine for longer than directed by your doctor.
3. If you notice any unusual and/or disturbing thoughts or behavior during treatment with LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, contact your doctor.
4. Tell your doctor about any medicines you may be taking, including medicines you may buy without a prescription and herbal preparations. You should also tell your doctor if you drink alcohol. DO NOT use alcohol while taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine.
5. Do not take LUNESTA unless you are able to get 8 or more hours of sleep before you must be active again.
6. Do not increase the prescribed dose of LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine unless instructed by your doctor.
7. When you first start taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, until you know whether the medicine will still have some effect on you the next day, use extreme care while doing anything that requires complete alertness, such as driving a car, operating machinery, or piloting an aircraft.
8. Be aware that you may have more sleeping problems the first night or two after stopping any sleep medicine.
9. Be sure to tell your doctor if you are pregnant, if you are planning to become pregnant, if you become pregnant, or if you are breastfeeding a baby while taking LUNESTA.
10. As with all prescription medicines, never share LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine with anyone else. Always store LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine in the original container and out of reach of children.
11. Be sure to tell your doctor if you suffer from depression.
12. LUNESTA works very quickly. You should only take LUNESTA immediately before going to bed.
13. For LUNESTA to work best, you should not take it with or immediately after a high-fat, heavy meal.
14. Some people, such as older adults (i.e., ages 65 and over) and people with liver disease, should start with the lower dose (1 mg) of LUNESTA. Your doctor may choose to start therapy at 2 mg. In general, adults under age 65 should be treated with 2 or 3 mg.
15. Each tablet is a single dose; do not crush or break the tablet.

Note: This summary provides important information about LUNESTA. If you would like more information, ask your doctor or pharmacist to let you read the Prescribing Information and then discuss it with him or her.

Rx only

SEPRACOR

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SEPRACOR

perdramatic mother (Annette Bening), a divorcée with literary aspirations. He watches her devolve into pill-induced incoherence, at which point she turns him over to the guardianship of her unorthodox psychologist, Dr. Finch (Brian Cox), and his family. Murphy puts a high gloss on dysfunction, and the tediously drawn-out scenes that are constantly punctuated with high-energy seventies songs counteract any potential emotional connection with the characters. The fine cast includes Evan Rachel Wood, Jill Clayburgh, and Gwyneth Paltrow as Finch's family and Joseph Fiennes as Augusten's first boyfriend, each exuding a gloominess that is never dispelled; Bening, though often leaning toward the absurd, is compelling as the disappointing star of Augusten's life. In the end, though, the whole affair is too melancholy to be funny and too cartoonish to be moving.—*S.L.* (In wide release.)

SHORTBUS
John Cameron Mitchell's sex-drenched study of a group of beautiful, emotionally lost New Yorkers on a quest for intimacy. The movie's central characters—a couples therapist who can't achieve orgasm (Sook-Yin Lee), a depressed ex-hustler and his boyfriend (played by the real-life couple Paul Dawson and PJ DeBoy), and an unhappy dominatrix (Lindsay Beamish)—are stereotypes of sad and lonely outsiders, but Mitchell's eager camerawork and playful screenplay filled with snappy comic asides make up for the film's emotional limitations. When everyone comes together at Shortbus, an underground sex club, the film exposes itself for what it really is—a sentimental, neo-romantic film in which hedonism is a tonic for the masses.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

Also Playing

CATCH A FIRE: In wide release. **THE GRUDGE 2:** In wide release. **THE MARINE:** In wide release. **OPEN SEASON:** In wide release. **SAW III:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"New-Filmmakers Presents." Nov. 1 at 6: "Original Intent: The Battle for America" (2006, Anthony Sherin). ♦ Special screening. A filmed performance by Robert Wilson. Nov. 1 at 7:30: "Overture for Ka Mountain and Guardenia Terrace" (1972, filmmaker unknown; silent).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—The films of Pedro Almodóvar. All films are in Spanish. Nov. 1 at 6:50: "Bad Education" (2004). ♦ Nov. 1 at 9:30: "Matador" (1986). ♦ Nov. 2 at 6:50: "The Flower of My Secret" (1995). ♦ Nov. 2 at 9:30: "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" (1988). ♦ New Czech films. All films are in Czech. Nov. 3 at 2, 4:30, and 7: "Lunacy" (2005, Jan Svankmajer). The 7 P.M. screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Nov. 4 at 2 and 6:50: "Wrong Side Up" (2005, Petr Zelenka). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the actor Ivan Trojan. ♦ Nov. 5 at 2 and 6:50: "Something Like Happiness" (2005, Bohdan Sláma).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Nov. 1-7 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:40: "The Rules of the Game" (1939, Jean Renoir; in French). The 7:30 screening on Nov. 1 will be introduced by the director Paul Schrader. ♦ In première. Nov. 1-7 at 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:20, 8, and 10: "Exit" (2005, Fernand Melgar; in French).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—The films of Jacques Audiard. Nov. 7 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "The Beat My Heart Skipped" (2005; in French). The 7 P.M. screening will be followed by a discussion with Audiard and the director James Toback.

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In première. (For screening times, go to www.ifccenter.com.) Nov. 1-7: "The Wild Blue Yonder" (2006, Werner Herzog). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction." Nov. 1 at 7:30: "Cul de Sac: A Suburban War Story" (2001, Garrett Scott), introduced by the editor Ian Olds. ♦ Nov. 7 at 7:30: "A Time for Burning" (1967, Barbara Connell and William C. Jersey), introduced by Jersey. ♦ "Weekend Classics." Nov. 3-5 at noon: "Silvia Prieto" (1999, Martín Rejtman; in Spanish). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Nov. 3-4: "Land of the Dead" (2005, George A. Romero). ♦ "Ecotopia." Nov. 6 at 7: "Darwin's Nightmare" (2004, Hubert Sauper; in English, Russian, and Swahili).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Kino! 2006: New Films from Germany." All films are in German. Nov. 1 at 6: "Winter Journey" (2006, Hans Steinbichler). ♦ Nov. 3 at 8:30: "Summer in Berlin" (2005, Andreas Dresen). ♦ "Prix Jean Vigo." Nov. 2 at 6: "Resisting Remembrance" (2000, Orso Miret; in French). ♦ "Chuck Statler: Before MTV." Nov. 2 at 8: A conversation with Statler. ♦ Nov. 3 at 8:15: Film clips directed by Statler (1979-2001). ♦ Music documentaries by Frank Scheffer. Nov. 4 at 2: "The Final Chorale" (1991) and "Éclat" (1994). ♦ Nov. 4 at 4:30: "A Labyrinth of Time" (2004). ♦ Nov. 4 at 8: "Docu-concert," performances of music by Elliott Carter and films by Scheffer. The composer and the director will be present. ♦ "Made in NY." Nov. 5 at 2 and Nov. 6 at 8:15: "Wall Street" (1987, Oliver Stone). ♦ Nov. 5 at 4:30 and Nov. 6 at 6: "Midnight Cowboy" (1969, John Schlesinger). ♦ "Out of Time: A Contemporary View." Nov. 5 at 2:30: "Ugetsu" (1953, Kenji Mizoguchi; in Japanese).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—2006 Machinima Film Festival, which features digital animation using video-game characters. For program information, visit www.movingimage.us.

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In première. Nov. 1 at 7, Nov. 2-3 and Nov. 5-7 at 9, and Nov. 4 at 5 and 9: "As the Call, So the Echo" (2005, Keir Moreano; in English and Vietnamese). ♦ In revival. Nov. 4 at 11: "Easy Rider" (1969, Dennis Hopper).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Nov. 3 at 9:30: "Walkabout" (1971, Nicolas Roeg), introduced by Sudha Narasimhan.

SCANDINAVIA HOUSE
58 Park Ave., between 37th and 38th Sts. (212-879-9779)—Through Dec. 16: Documentaries from Scandinavia. Nov. 1 at 6:30: "How Do You Like Iceland?" (2005, Kristín Ólafs; in Icelandic and English). ♦ Nov. 4 at 3: "Daddy and the Muscle Factory" (1992, Ilppo Pohjola; in Finnish and English) and "100% Human" (2004, Trond Winterkjær and Jan Dalchow; in Norwegian).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Nov. 3-4: "Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein" (†).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Thalia Film Classics." Nov. 5 and Nov. 7 at 5: "Mouchette" (†).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Nov. 16: "Resistance and Rebirth," Hungarian films. All films are in Hungarian. Nov. 1 at 7:30: "Recsk" (1989, Géza Böszörményi and Lívia Gyarmathy). ♦ Nov. 2 at 6:30 and Nov. 5 at 3:45: "The Round-Up" (1965, Miklós Jancsó). ♦ Nov. 2 at 8:30 and Nov. 5 at 5:45: "Fresh Air" (2006, Ágnes Kocsis). ♦ Nov. 4 at 6:15 and Nov. 7 at 2: "Time Stands Still" (1983, Péter Gothár). ♦ Nov. 4 at 8:30 and Nov. 7 at 4: "Jo-

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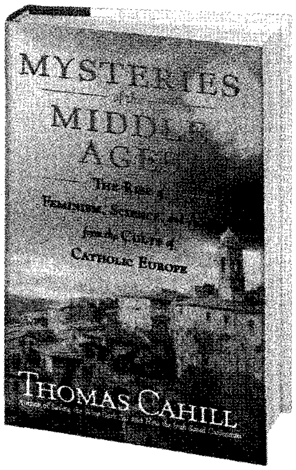

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hanna" (2005, Kornél Mundruczó). ♦ Nov. 5 at 2: "Winter Wind" (1969, Jancsó). ♦ Nov. 5 at 8: "Red Psalm" (†). ♦ "Golden Silents." Nov. 3 at 7:30: "Head Over Heels" (1920, Paul Bern and Victor Schertzinger) and short films starring Mabel Normand. ♦ Première screening. Nov. 7 at 7: "For Your Consideration" (2006, Christopher Guest), followed by a conversation with Guest and the actors Eugene Levy, Catherine O'Hara, Harry Shearer, Bob Balaban, and Parker Posey.

READINGS AND TALKS

"HOT BUTTON!"
This new discussion series, organized by the New Museum of Contemporary Art and Cooper Union, gets under way on Nov. 1 at 6:30 with the performance artist Marina Abramovic, the Picasso biographer John Richardson, the chef Wylie Dufresne, and others talking about passion, creativity, and money. (Great Hall, 7 E. 7th St. For more information, call 212-219-1222.)

FAÏZA GUÈNE
The writer, who is of Algerian descent and who grew up in public housing in Pantin, outside Paris, reads from her début novel, "Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow." (Barnes & Noble, Sixth Ave. at W. 8th St. Nov. 2 at 7:30. No tickets necessary.)

"WORKS & PROCESS"
The Guggenheim's performing-arts series presents the poet James Tate, who will read from his work; discuss it with Sarah Rothenberg, the artistic director of the chamber-music society Da Camera of Houston; and listen while five of his poems that have been set to music by such composers as Eve Beglarian, Fred Ho, and Charles Wuorinen are performed by members of the Group for Contemporary Music. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Nov. 5-6 at 7:30.)

92ND STREET Y
The graphic novelists Art Spiegelman, Joann Sfar, Jessica Abel, and Mark Siegel discuss their craft with the radio-show host Leonard Lopate. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Nov. 5 at 7:30.)

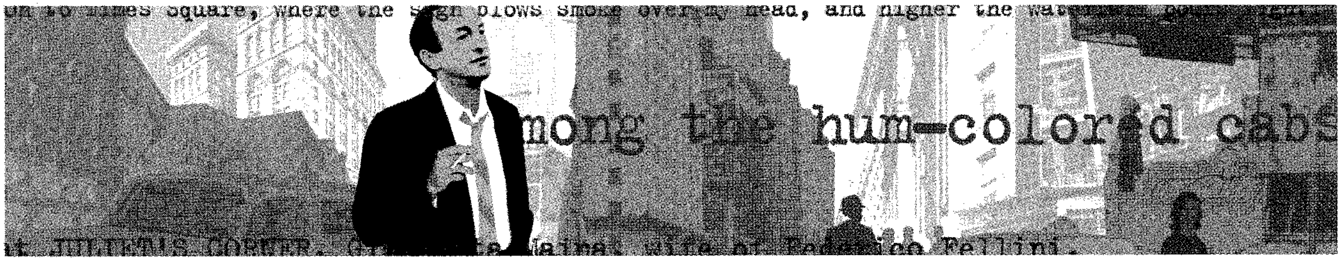
"ELECTION EVE SPECIAL"
Marian Seldes, Eli Wallach, Betsy von Furstenberg, and other actors celebrate the publication of the two-volume collection "American Speeches: Political Oratory" with dramatic readings of the addresses that have shaped our history. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. No tickets necessary. Nov. 6 at noon.)

QUEENS COLLEGE
The novelists Orhan Pamuk, Salman Rushdie, and Norman Manea read from and talk about their work. (LeFrak Concert Hall, Music Building, Flushing. For more information, visit www.qc.edu/readings. Nov. 7 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"SIX BOROUGH SHOPOCALYPSE TOUR"
Just in time for the holiday-gift-buying season, the Reverend Billy, a fervent and towering activist (otherwise known as the performance artist Bill Talen) who preaches an anticonsumerism gospel, is taking his Stop Shopping Gospel Choir on the road. They'll be hitting points across the city (and in New Jersey), starting with an appearance at the Brooklyn Lyceum on Nov. 5 at 4. (Fourth Ave. at President St., Brooklyn. For more information, visit www.revbilly.com. Through Dec. 10.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
One can almost catch a glimpse of Gilberte Swann, Marcel Proust's "*jeune fille en fleur*," on the beach in Monet's windswept "La Plage à Trouville," one of the top lots at **Sotheby's** evening sale of Impressionist and modern art (Nov. 7), which also includes a glorious still-life of fruit and a ginger jar by Cézanne and a portrait of a rather vulnerable-looking little boy ("The Concierge's Son") by Amedeo Modigliani. At the house's two-day print extravaganza (Nov. 2-3), the delicately featured Count Robert de Montesquiou, the inspiration for Proust's churlish Baron de Charlus, almost smiles—but not quite—in a lithograph by Whistler. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Christie's** hosts its own print sale (Oct. 31-Nov. 1) at which screen prints, etchings, lithographs, and linocuts by the likes of Warhol, Picasso, and Wayne Thiebaud will be on offer. On Nov. 2, the house presents the latest installment in its series of sales of American historical documents from the collection of the late Malcolm Forbes, followed by its second evening wine auction. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ New York's Print Week will be marked by the arrival of the sixteenth-annual **International Fine Print Dealers Association's Print Fair** (Nov. 2-5), at which ninety-one dealers from Europe, Canada, and the U.S. will present their wares, from the sixteenth century to the twenty-first, at the 7th Regiment Armory. (Park Ave. at 67th St. 212-674-6095.) ♦ **Doyle** holds a sale of Old Master, modern, and contemporary prints, just after its morning auction of books and autographs (Nov. 7). (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.)



ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
THE BROTHERS K.
Nov. 17-26

The brothers Denis and Mikhail Kaufman stayed in Moscow after the Revolution; Denis became Dziga Vertov, a director of paeans to Soviet life, and Mikhail was his cameraman. Their little brother, Boris, went to Paris, became Jean Vigo's cinematographer, and then came to the U.S., where he worked regularly with Sidney Lumet. Walter Reade offers a batch of their masterworks from Russia, France, and Hollywood. (212-875-5600.)

JOHN RITTER

ART
CHOO-CHOO
Nov. 18-Jan. 7

The New York Botanical Garden's annual "Holiday Train Show" sends tiny locomotives chugging through botanical replicas of New York City landmarks. This year's show includes miniatures of several long-destroyed mansions, re-created in berries, twigs, and seeds. (718-817-8700.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
STRINGS ATTACHED
Nov. 19

The dashing Haitian-American violinist and composer Daniel Bernard Roumain and the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Paul Moravec are the stars of the latest program by the glamorous, all-female Lark Quartet. (Merkin Concert Hall. 212-501-3330.)

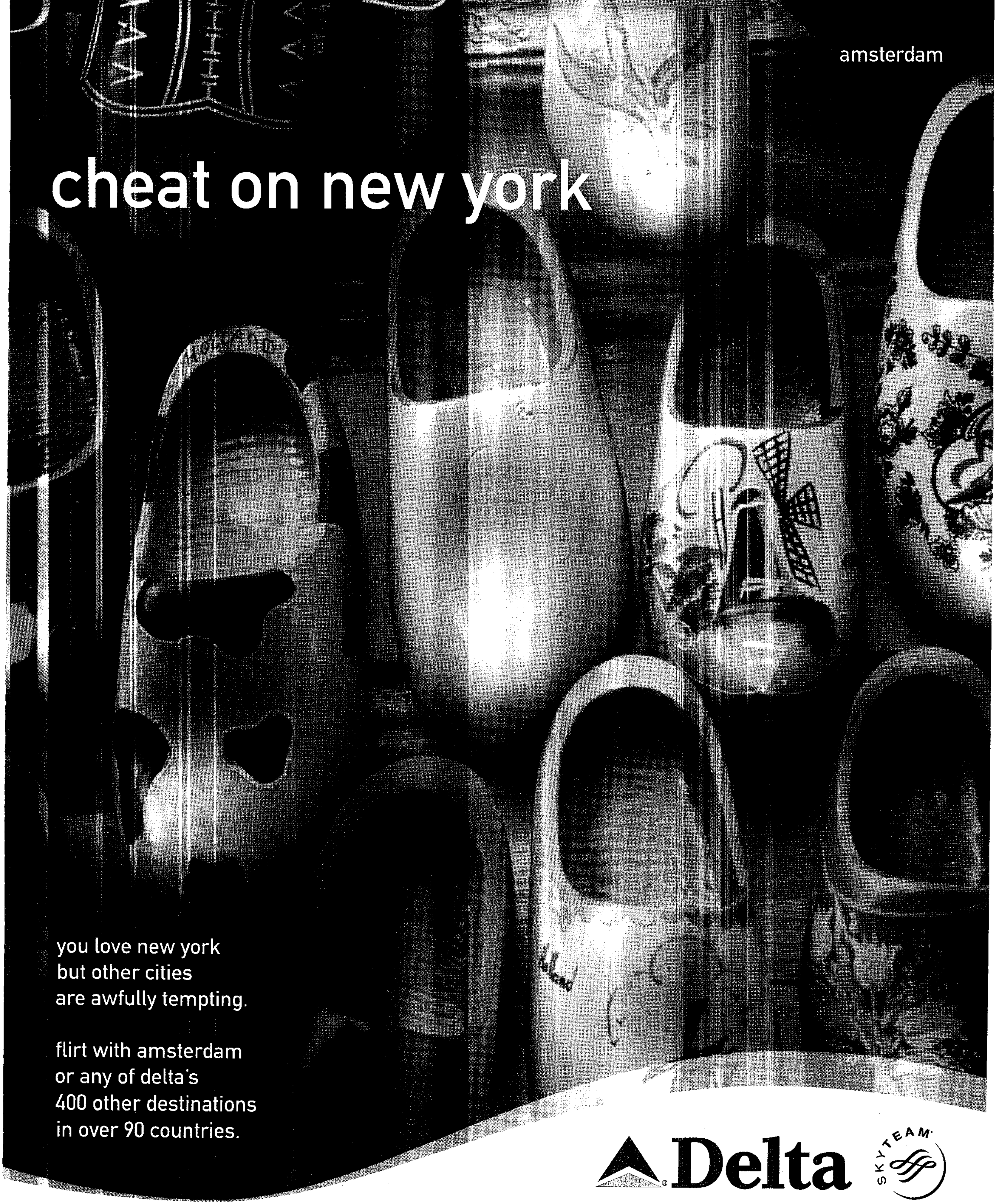
THE THEATRE
SWEET TEMPTATION
Nov. 28

Kristin Chenoweth stars in "The Apple Tree," based on "The Diary of Adam and Eve," by Mark Twain, and two other stories of mortal love. The musical débuted in 1966, starring Alan Alda and Barbara Harris and directed by Mike Nichols. Gary Griffin directs the revival. (212-239-6200.)

READINGS AND TALKS
URBAN VERSE
Nov. 28-30

Frank O'Hara, who died in 1966, was a leading member of the New York School of poets. For much of his life, O'Hara held various posts at the Museum of Modern Art (his "Lunch Poems" were written when he should have been eating). He would have been eighty this year, and a number of events are planned, including a celebratory reading at the Poetry Project. (www.poetshouse.org.)

A celebration of Frank O'Hara, at the Poetry Project.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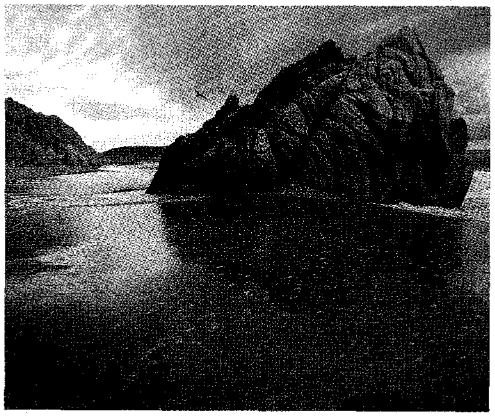

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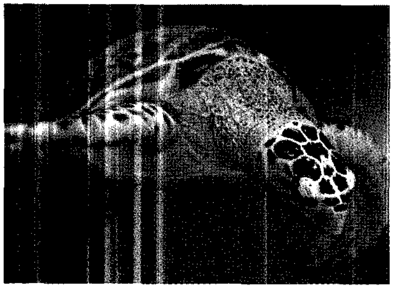

Mexico's Unsung Pacific Coast

IN THE SENSUOUS MEXICAN ROAD FILM "Y tu mamá también," two teenage boys entice a young woman to travel with them to a mythic beach on the Oaxaca coast. Eventually they reach it, and when the camera sweeps its pristine beauty every viewer wants to follow.

In reality it is easy to get to. Fly into Huatulco International Airport, less than an hour by plane from Mexico City or Oaxaca City, and you will be only a few miles from the splendid isolation of Playa Cacaluta, where part of the movie was shot.

Such privacy is the lure of Huatulco, where nearly forty beaches dot the curves of nine bays. Tourism development—directed and restrained by the Mexican government—treads gently here. Seventy per cent of the bay area will be preserved for migrating birds and marine creatures.

The handful of luxurious resorts includes Camino Real Zaashila, which sports a beach on Tangolunda Bay. Small hotels are clustered near the zocalo of La Crucecita, the marina of Santa Cruz, and the beach in Chahué. Boat trips departing from Santa Cruz promise scenic grandeur above and below water. Restaurants in La Crucecita serve superb Oaxacan cuisine, including *tlayudas*, a dish made from oversized tortillas.

Freedom from crowds means you can just take off and explore. Drive west about thirty miles to the exquisite turquoise bay of Puerto Angel. Highway 175 turns north from here to ascend the Sierra Madre del Sur through jungle refreshed by waterfalls. When you come to the mountaintop village of Pluma Hidalgo, you'll see the Pacific coast in panoramic view and be within visiting distance of Oaxaca's organic coffee plantations.

Sightseeing slows to a turtle's pace a few miles west at Mazunte. Here the National Mexican Turtle Center protects various species of sea turtles and their breeding grounds. In nearby Playa Ventanilla, you'll find a beach of meditative quietness and an ecotourism project run by a coöperative of families, who lead lagoon boat trips among the crocodiles.

At Puerto Escondido, a small resort center seventy miles west of Huatulco, the pace picks up with that of the waves of Zicatela Beach. Widely considered one of the world's top surfing destinations, its wave-riding competitions will be a highlight of the town's Fiesta de Noviembre, throughout the month of November.

This is about as intensely competitive as things get on the Oaxacan coast. And for visitors seeking tranquil beaches, that's the beauty of it.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: BEACH IN HUATULCO ©CRAIG WETHERALL; ZIPOLITE BEACH ©NICOLA OKIN FRIOLI; SANTA CRUZ HUATULCO SIGN ©JONATHAN CHAN; SEAFOOD AND SEA TURTLE IMAGES ©GORG MATZAT

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[illegible] that as early as January 8, 2007, passports will be required for US Citizens of all ages returning [illegible]

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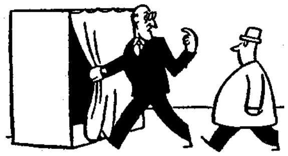
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
HEARTS AND BRAINS



The great bafflement of next week's midterm congressional elections is that there is even a sliver of a hint of a shadow of a doubt about the outcome. The polls are unequivocal. In a mid-October NBC/*Wall Street Journal* survey, the public's "job approval" of the Republican Congress stood at a wan sixteen per cent, as against seventy-five per cent disapproving. Another measurement normally regarded as electorally predictive, the one pollsters call "right track/wrong track," is nearly as one-sided. In last week's *Newsweek* survey, twenty-five per cent of respondents pronounced themselves satisfied with "the way things are going in the United States at this time," while sixty-seven per cent registered dissatisfaction. The *Newsweek* poll also found that, by a 55-37 margin, likely voters generically prefer Democratic candidates for the House of Representatives to Republican ones. Those numbers are a near-mirror image of the same survey's job rating for President Bush: thirty-five per cent approve of his performance, fifty-seven per cent disapprove of it.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

There's a lively debate among historians over the question of whether the record of the forty-third President, compiled with the indispensable help of a complaisant Congress, is the worst in American history or merely the worst of the sixteen who managed to make it into (if not out of) a second full term. That the record is appalling is by now beyond serious dispute. It includes an unending deficit—this year, it's $260 billion—that has already added $1.5 trillion to the national debt; the subcontracting of environmental, energy, labor, and health-care policymaking to corporate interests; repeated efforts to suppress scientific truth; a set of economic and fiscal policies that have slowed growth, spurred inequality, replenished the ranks of the poor and uninsured, and exacerbated the insecurities of the middle class; and, on Capitol Hill, a festival of bribery, some prosecutable (such as the felonies that have put one prominent Republican member of Congress in prison, while another awaits sentencing), some not (such as the reported two-million-dollar salary conferred upon a Republican congressman who became the pharmaceutical industry's top lobbyist immediately after shepherding into law a bill forbidding the government to negotiate prices for prescription drugs).

In 2002 and 2004, the ruling party avoided retribution for offenses like these by exploiting the fear of terrorism. What is different this time is that the overwhelming failure of the Administration's Iraq gamble is now apparent to all. This war of choice has pointlessly drained American military strength, undermined what had originally appeared to be success in Afghanistan, handed the Iranian mullahs a strategic victory, immunized the North Korean regime from a forceful response to its nuclear defiance, and compromised American leadership of the democratic world. You can read all about it, not only in the government's own recently leaked National Intelligence Estimate, which reports that the Iraq war has intensified the danger of Islamist terrorism, but also in a shelf of books—a score or more of them, beginning two and a half years ago with Richard A. Clarke's "Against All Enemies" and continuing through Bob Woodward's "State of Denial"—that document the mendacity, incompetence, lawlessness, and ideological arrogance surrounding the origins and conduct of that war.

In a normal democracy, given the

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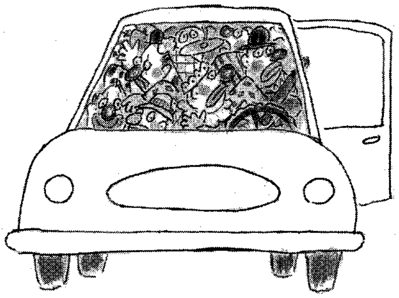


state of public opinion and the record of the incumbent government, it would be taken for granted that come next Tuesday the ruling party would be turned out. But, for reasons that have less to do with the wizardry of Karl Rove than with the structural biases of America's electoral machinery, Democrats enter every race carrying a bag of sand. The Senate's fifty-five Republicans represent fewer Americans than do its forty-five Democrats. On the House side, Democratic candidates have won a higher proportion of the average district vote than Republicans in four of the five biennial elections since 1994, but—thanks to a combination of gerrymandering and demographics—Republicans remain in the majority. To win back the House, Democrats need something close to a landslide. Their opponents, to judge from their behavior, seem to think they might get one.

During the past week, the foul mood of the leaders of the Republican Party and its hard-right outriders touched what one must earnestly hope was bottom. In Tennessee, where a talented, relatively conservative young Democrat, Harold Ford, Jr., is campaigning to become the first African-American senator from a Southern or border state since Reconstruction, a television ad is making a nauseating kind of political history. The ad, which appeals to a poisonous stereotype of black sexuality, is destined for a long life as a reference point in discussions of political perfidy. Its only moment of honesty—an involuntary moment, compelled by the McCain-Feingold law of 2002—is provided by a hurried off-camera voice: "The Republican National Committee is responsible for the content of this advertising." Meanwhile, Rush Limbaugh, the radio broadcaster who is the Republican Party's most prominent unofficial spokesman, unleashed an unusually ugly attack on the integrity of the actor Michael J. Fox, who has been appearing in spots for Democratic candidates who support embryonic-stem-cell research. (In 2004, he did the same for a Republican, Senator Arlen Specter.) Fox has Parkinson's, and it shows. Here is what Limbaugh said of one such spot: "In this commercial, he is exaggerating the effects of the disease. He is moving all around and shaking. And it's purely an act.... This is really shameless of Michael J. Fox. Either he didn't take his medication or he's acting, one of the two." (In reality, Fox's body movements are a side effect of his medication, without which he is unable to speak.) And in one of the most important of next Tuesday's contests—Virginia's, which pits the incumbent senator, George Allen, against James Webb—Allen is employing a tactic that combines prurience with philistinism.

Allen, as the now-famous "Macaca" incident and its aftermath showed, is a bigot and a bully. Webb is a Democrat-turned-Republican—he was President Reagan's Secretary of the Navy—whom the Iraq war turned back into a Democrat. He is a novelist by profession. At the end of last week, as a new poll showed Allen slipping behind, he put out a press release consisting of annotated snippets from Webb's novels, which draw on his experiences and observations as a marine in Vietnam. The snippets record callous behavior, bleak sexuality, and rough talk. (To suggest that their author advocates such things is akin to saying that "Ben-Hur" is a brief for crucifixion.) Like the novels from which they are torn, the snippets are about men at war, so it is perhaps not so surprising that they are short on what Allen's press release primly calls "positive female role models."

There is much more along these lines, from many places, almost all of it of Republican provenance. But the most depraved pronouncement of the week came from the Vice-President of the United States, Dick Cheney. In an interview with one of three dozen right-wing radio hosts invited to spend a day broadcasting from the White House, Cheney was asked if he didn't think it was "silly" even to debate about "dunking a terrorist in water." "I do agree," he replied. The interviewer pressed: "Would you agree a dunk in water is a no-brainer if it can save lives?" Cheney: "It's a no-brainer for me."

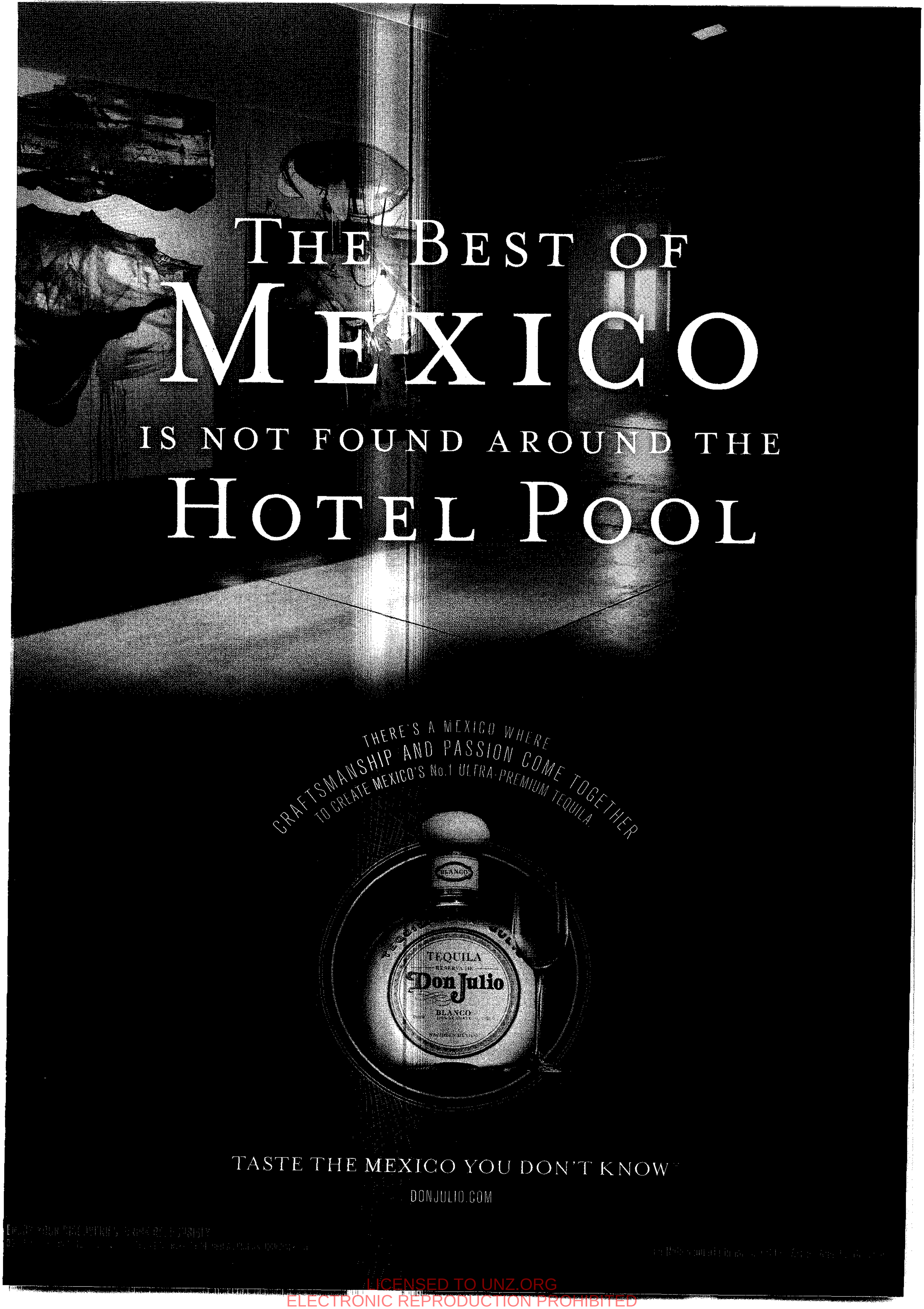
The "dunk in water" they were talking about is waterboarding. It has been used by the Gestapo, the North Koreans, and the Khmer Rouge. After the Second World War, a Japanese soldier was sentenced to twenty-five years' hard labor for using it on American prisoners. It is torture, and torture is not a no-brainer. It is a no-souler. The no-brainer is the choice on Election Day.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

DEPT. OF PLUMBING
DIRTY WIKITRICKS

If you look up "negative campaigning" on Wikipedia, the interactive Internet encyclopedia, you will learn that "mudslinging has been called 'as American as Mississippi mud.' " Click on "mudslinging" and there it is: "The exchange of petty, vicious insults, especially between candidates in an election. This phrase can also refer to the slinging or hurling of mud."

Readers of Wikipedia write and edit the entries themselves; the negative-campaigning page has been amended twelve times this fall, both by Wikipedia administrators and by civilians. In spite of some recent deletions (gone, for now, is the disqualifyingly "absurd" statement "The use of negative campaigning is a contribution to modern politics by Joseph Goebbels"), the entry is a fairly ample one. Examples abound: L.B.J.'s Daisy Girl, G. Gordon Liddy, Willie Horton, the Swift Boat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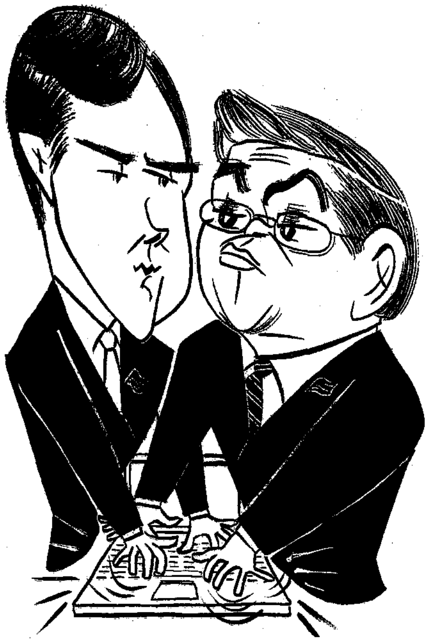
Veterans. But you will not find any reference—not yet, anyway—to the role Wikipedia itself has come to play in the mudslinging game.

This election season, in several races, campaign staffs have been accused of, and even caught, tweaking the Wikipedia entries of opposing candidates. In Georgia, the campaign manager for a gubernatorial candidate resigned after it emerged that he had altered an opponent's biography by adding a scandalous (but true) story about the opponent's son, who had crashed a car while drunk, killing a passenger. Liddy this ain't, to say nothing of Goebbels, but such dirty trickery may be a bit more insidious than, say, defacing a campaign poster with a mustache and devil's horns.

Among the closest and dirtiest contests this year is the U.S. Senate race in New Jersey, between the Democratic incumbent, Bob Menendez, and Tom Kean, Jr., the son of the former governor. In the midst of much ugliness, supporters of each candidate have been waging a Wikipedia war. The candidates' entries have been in constant flux. Many of the changes have been relatively trivial, such as whether a *Times* Op-Ed piece is a legitimate citation. Others have been more substantial, such as the addition, removal, restoration, and subsequent wrangling over a section in the Menendez entry that was called "charges of corruption." (The candidates have been quarrelling over whether a federal probe into a New Jersey nonprofit community organization constitutes a criminal investigation of Menendez. The fact that it does not has not stopped Kean from making the claim.) As usual, many of the expurgations have been of vulgarities and pranks—"vandalism," in the argot. If a curious voter had looked up Menendez last Wednesday, he would have come across the observation "He funny looking." Last Friday morning, there was nothing on the Menendez page at all but, for a few minutes, the word "fetus." As for Kean, users have had to undo Bart Simpsonesque reports that the challenger "resides in Flat Butt, Nebraska, with his husband, Joe."



Tom Kean, Jr., and Bob Menendez

The more consequential work, however, of adding, removing, burnishing, or burying references to scandal or policy has fallen to earnest Wikicivilians. The two campaigns each deny that they have engaged in Wikitrickery, but some circumstantial evidence makes you wonder.

When asked about the Wikipedia entries, Scott Shields, the Internet director for the Menendez campaign, referred to a report from last month which seemed to implicate the Kean campaign. The creator of a Web site, BlueJersey.com, had discovered that various anti-Menendez remarks on the site could be traced to the same Internet protocol, or I.P., address as that which appears on e-mails from the Kean campaign's spokeswoman, Jill Hazelbaker. This practice—conducting a phony grassroots campaign—is known as "astroturfing." The same I.P. address was also linked to some of the unflattering amendments to Menendez's Wikipedia page.

"It's nonsense," Hazelbaker said last week. She pointed out that the I.P. address was that of the campaign headquarters, in Mountainside, New Jersey, and added, "We have hundreds of volunteers coming through here. It could've been anyone. Or someone could just sit on our front porch and use our wireless connection and our I.P. address."

A twenty-four-year-old Menendez supporter who has been monitoring the Wikipedia entries of both candidates fessed up last week to making occasional anonymous tweaks. "I change things about issue stances," he said. "You know, 'Menendez is in favor of increasing taxes on all Americans.' I find the article that disputes this. And sometimes they change it back." (He's not sure, either, whether "they" are Kean staffers or what he calls "wacktivists.")

On Kean's page there has been a long-running take-it-out–put-it-back-in duel concerning a video of the candidate shunning an antiwar activist whose son is stationed in Falluja. Menendez supporters write up the incident on Wikipedia, under the heading "Refusal to meet with military families." Kean supporters, in response, add a few sentences about how the incident was a setup, orchestrated by the Menendez campaign. Then the Menendez partisans revise the revision. And so on. Wabbit season; duck season; ad infinitum. Or at least until Election Day.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

THE ARTISTIC LIFE
JESSIE AGAIN

Jessie Mann has chiselled shoulders and dark eyes set deep in their sockets. She is twenty-five and looks pretty much the way she did when she was three and eight and twelve, and her mother, Sally Mann, was taking photographs of her that, depending on whom you asked, were either exploitative obscenities or innocence incarnate. The photographs showed her as a ferally beautiful river kid, her body crusted with mud or wreathed with night-blooming cereus or hanging naked from a hay hook. Over the past four years, she has been posing again, for a new collection of portraits by the photographer Len Prince. It is a loaded second act, as if one of Velázquez's *infantas* had grown up and sat for Rembrandt.

The interim between musehoods has been rich but complicated for Jessie, the middle of three children. "The best analogy I have for it is the Glass family in the Salinger novels," she said several years ago. Since modelling for her mother's "Immediate Family" series, in 1993, Jessie has shaved her legs (and her head), gone to science camp, and worked as a pastry chef. She started drinking, early and excessively; dropped out of high school in Virginia; went north to a Quaker boarding school; and graduated from Washington and Lee with a degree in psychology. After college, she moved to a tumble-

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Jody Clemente
Pelham, New York

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down plantation, where she grows squash and peas. "I can't get away from the country," she said recently, but admitted that she sometimes tills her plot in what she calls her "miniskirt boots."

The house where Jessie lives is fifteen minutes from where she was raised, in Lexington, Virginia. For a while, she was set on training to be an ob-gyn, but she started painting seriously (with the encouragement of Cy Twombly, a family friend), and, more recently, her collaboration with Prince has been consuming. "There, on a white leather banquette, was Jessie, with her legs curled up," Prince, who is fifty-three, said, recalling their first meeting, in New York. "She reached out, and I think I kissed her hand." The next day, Jessie went to his studio and posed nude, on a pedestal, as a whirling dervish. At the end of the afternoon, Prince officially accepted her as his muse.

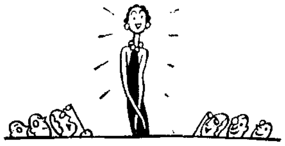
The partnership—a symbiosis self-consciously undertaken in the mode of Man Ray and Lee Miller, or Pierre-Louis Pierson and the Countess de Castiglione—has, Jessie said, "filled a void in my life." Prince, for his part, said, "If anyone is art, it's Jessie." Sometimes there is a third communicant: Jason Paulson, Prince's boyfriend, who did Jessie's makeup and hair for many of the pictures—elaborately staged tableaux that reference such icons as the goddess Diana, Frida Kahlo, and Ingres's odalisques. Last month, several dozen of the photographs were shown at the Danziger Projects gallery, in Chelsea. The show was titled "Jessie Mann: Self-Possessed."

Jessie says that she and her mother remain close: "We're sort of lucky if we can touch base once a week—we're not the type of women to go shopping together, talking about boyfriends, but we have a very lucky intimate connection." Jessie said, of the early portraits, "It's very difficult to say exactly who makes the pictures"; she sees her alliance with Prince as an extension of her work with her mother, which has occasionally vexed her but has always made her proud.

"People have pointed out the obvious Freudian interpretation," she said. "And it's true that there is this sort of surface layer to doing these photos with Len—a power struggle, to reassert my identity. But I'm a Jungian girl myself. I'm interested in the significance of being a character in the story of art." Peppering her speech with references to Barthes, Camille Paglia, and quantum theory, she went on, "This is where it gets kind of Freudian—not to go back and give my childhood self some power but to give Marilyn Monroe some credit. That girl worked her butt off and wasn't just a pretty face." She thought for a moment. "My life, as it stands, is the best opportunity an artist has ever had to make that point."

—*Lauren Collins*

THE BOARDS
FAMILY DRAMA



Charlotte d'Amboise, the Broadway veteran of such shows as "Chicago" and "Sweet Charity," stands onstage without moving for the first hour of "A Chorus Line," the revival that recently opened at the Schoenfeld Theatre. "Then I have twelve continuous minutes of solo, dancing across the whole stage," she said the other day. "I do a lot of pirouettes, high kicks, back layouts—very athletic," she said. "Waiting an hour to move is hard. I always want to rub my neck." She was standing, barefoot, in the kitchen of the town house in Harlem that she bought a few years ago with her husband, the actor Terrence Mann. There was an hour before she had to leave for the theatre. She had on jeans and a T-shirt and was filling a couple of bowls with hot oatmeal at a large granite counter. Nearby, on the walls, were framed Hirschfeld caricatures—one of Mann as Javert in "Les Misérables" (1987) and one of her as Anita from "West Side Story" in "Jerome Robbins' Broadway" (1989). Her daughters, Shelby, three, and JoJo, four, were noisily racing around the kitchen on bicycles with training wheels. Both were barefoot, Shelby in a tiny black lace tutu, JoJo in a princess nightgown.

"I also do some belting in the show," d'Amboise said. "I'm a belter." She gave a quick demonstration:

Give me somebody to dance for.
Give me somebody to show.
Let me wake up in the morning,
To find I have somewhere exciting to *goooo.*

She served the oatmeal to the children. "They're the main joy of my life," she said. "I lived with Terry for seven years before we were married, and for the next seven years I couldn't get pregnant. It was important for me to see Terry as a father. So Terry and I put in to adopt a baby from China. While waiting to hear, I got pregnant. When the Chinese FedExed us the baby's picture, the sign that the adoption had gone through, I was in the hospital, having Shelby. So Terry went without me to China to pick up eleven-month-old JoJo, our name for her."

From the age of eight to fourteen, d'Amboise danced with New York City Ballet, together with her brother Christopher, her sister Kate, and their father, Jacques, a principal dancer. She was a regular in most of the ballets, including "The Nutcracker," while attending P.S. 199, and then the Professional Children's School, where she decided to head in the direction of theatre.

"I promised Daddy, if I don't get a Broadway show, I'll go to college," she said. "It took me a year, going on tons of auditions. Then I got 'Cats,' in 1983. I was Cassandra. And I met Terry. He was Rum Tum Tugger." She grew up in a brownstone on West Seventy-first Street. "Before the neighborhood became fashionable," she said. "Daddy used to walk with us to Lincoln Center, making up dance steps on the way." She went on, "Balanchine would let Daddy use the State Theatre for teaching. Daddy always tried to get boys to take ballet; getting them to the ballet bar is difficult. Daddy runs the National Dance Institute now, but he's always going to the public schools to teach and to encourage underprivileged kids to dance."

Enter Terrence Mann, carrying a couple of brown paper bags of groceries. He maneuvered safely around his daughters, now speeding on foot around the kitchen. "Got everything," he said. "Including some safe spinach."

Mann started chopping spinach. JoJo took some crayons and began a drawing of him. Then Shelby climbed onto the counter and stood up. Her father put down the knife, backed four feet away from his daughter, and shouted "Velcro!" She gave a gleeful laugh, flung out her arms, took a flying leap, and landed in her father's arms.

—*Lillian Ross*

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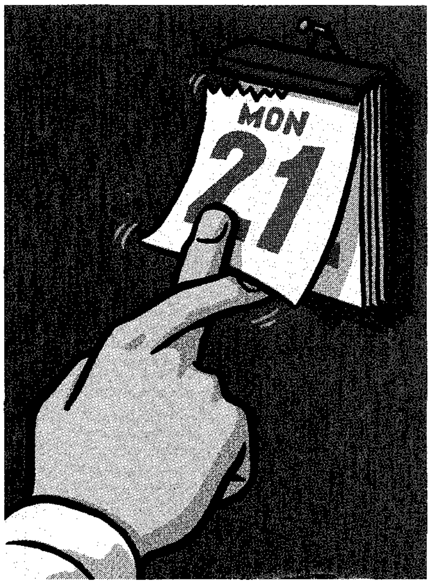
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
THE DATING GAME

Scandals move in unpredictable ways. When news broke, earlier this year, that some companies had backdated stock-option grants to employees in order to make them more valuable, it seemed like a problem that would come and go quickly: the number of companies thought to be involved was small and the impact fairly trivial. But the scandal has metastasized, engulfing more than a hundred companies, sparking criminal indictments, and forcing the departure of high-profile executives, including, just two weeks ago, William McGuire, the venerated chief of the health-care giant United Health Group. Accounting scandals are nothing new. What's distinctive about this one is that the benefits companies got from backdating were so small. Never, you might say, have so many cheated so much to gain so little.

The most common stock options are known as "at the money" options, which let you buy the company's stock at the price that it had on the day of the grant. They're valuable only if the stock price rises after you get them. The companies involved in the recent scandal were backdating options to a time when the stock price was lower, making them immediately lucrative. As it happens, companies are perfectly free to issue options priced below the current market: those are called "in the money" options, and they're worth something right when they're issued. (If you're given an option with a strike price of ten dollars when today's stock price is fifteen dollars, each option can yield an immediate profit of five dollars.) But there's a rule that companies have to follow when they issue "in the money" options: they have to disclose it in their financial statements.

The backdating companies broke this rule: they reported how many options they were issuing, but conveniently omitted the fact that they had been backdated. In Washington, people say that it's not the crime that gets you—it's the coverup. In the case of backdating, the only crime was the coverup.

The question is why anyone bothered. Press accounts of backdating have made it seem like a tool that larcenous C.E.O.s used to pay themselves and their cronies more money than they would otherwise have made. But companies didn't need backdating to lavish huge sums of money on their executives: they could have issued more at-the-money options to make up the difference, or they could have just handed out grants of stock. Yet a study by the finance professors Erik Lie and Randall A. Heron suggests that fourteen per cent of option grants to top executives between 1996 and 2005 were "backdated or otherwise manipulated." Why did they sneak around? One reason is public relations. Companies typically justify issuing execs tens of millions of dollars in stock options by claiming that they're an incentive for performance: the executives get rich only if they do a good job and the stock goes up. Unless executives can time-travel, though, it's hard to make that case for backdated options.



The bigger reason for choosing to backdate is to get around some bothersome accounting regulations. Until recently, the regulations distinguished, for no good reason, between in-the-money and at-the-money options. In-the-money options—but not at-the-money options—had to be recorded as an expense, which drove down reported earnings. Backdating allowed companies to reward employees with in-the-money options while getting the favorable accounting treatment of at-the-money options.

Putting option grants in one accounting box rather than another has no effect on a company's performance—how much cash it generates every year. It's purely a cosmetic change. But lots of C.E.O.s believe that appearances count. Classifying the options properly would have lowered the number in the "earnings" box, and so C.E.O.s assumed that it would also drag down the company's stock price. They played games with their accounting because they thought investors weren't smart enough to look at the fundamentals. They were "managing earnings," massaging the numbers, something that many (perhaps most) companies do in some form or other—even when it hurts the company's long-term interests. In one survey, more than seventy-five per cent of chief financial officers said that, given a choice, they would choose to improve short-term earnings at the expense of long-term cash flow. Executives do it because they believe that if they don't the stock market will punish them.

They're wrong. As the investment strategist Michael Mauboussin puts it, "The market follows cash flows," not earnings. As long as revenues and expenditures are reported honestly, accounting legerdemain doesn't fool the market. A study of two ways of accounting for acquisitions—one that reduces earnings and one that boosts them—found no difference in the way the market evaluated them. Likewise, when companies changed the way they accounted for their inventories, adopting a new method that increased their cash flow but reduced their reported earnings, their stock price went up, not down. And a study of three hundred companies that voluntarily decided to expense all their stock options saw no negative impact on stock prices.

Most efforts to massage the numbers have trivial consequences. But the blowup over the backdating scandal should force a reckoning with the facts. Too many C.E.O.s praise the virtues of the market while treating investors like shortsighted greedheads. They ought to take account of what they see in the mirror.

—*James Surowiecki*

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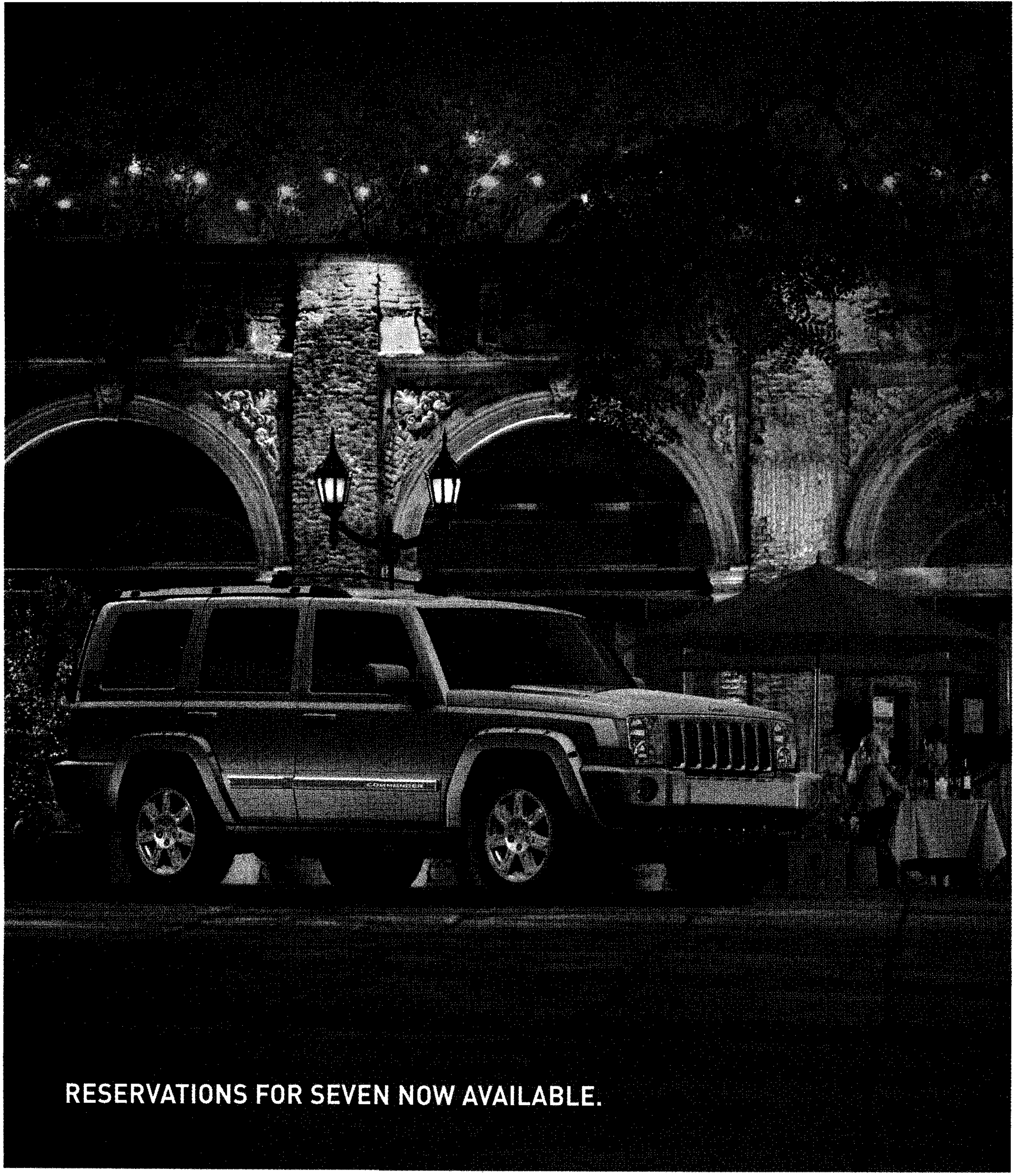
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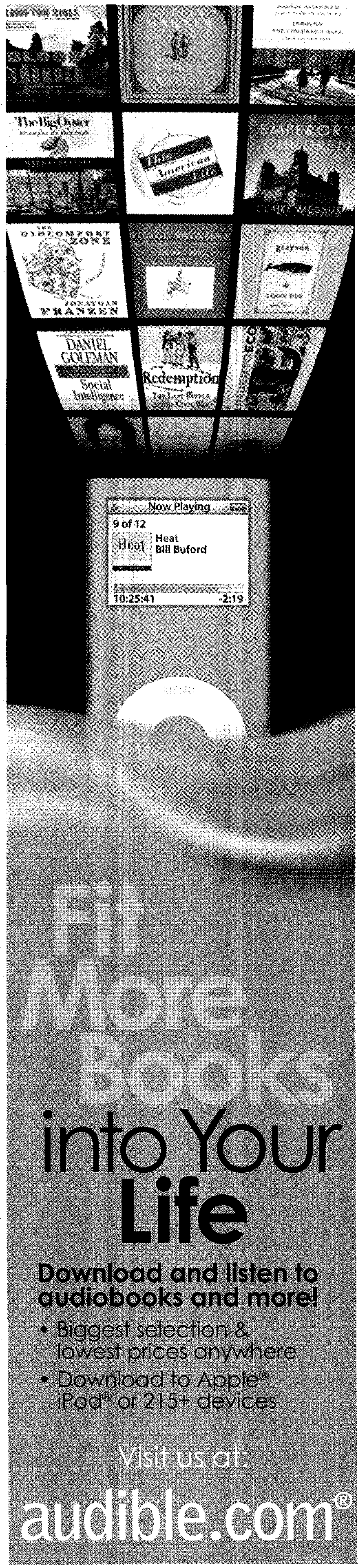

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ANNALS OF POWER

FRESH PRINCE

Hip-hop's Machiavelli.

BY NICK PAUMGARTEN

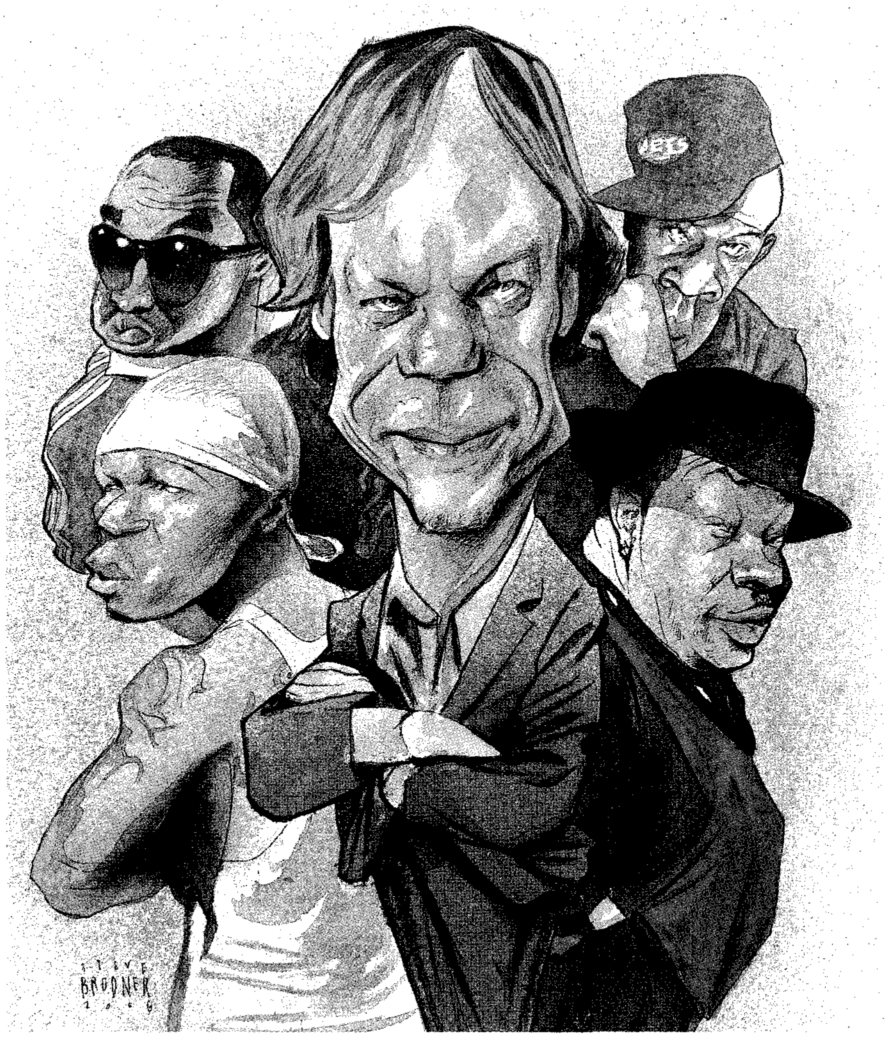
The first law of power, as set forth (or down) by Robert Greene in his 1998 book, "The 48 Laws of Power," is "Never outshine the master." Thou shalt not upstage the boss, the benefactor, the mentor, or the talent, whose good graces bestow clout upon thee and whose ego must therefore be stroked. Greene illustrates each of his laws with historical instances of transgression and observance, and for the first one the exemplars are, respectively, Nicolas Fouquet, Louis XIV's finance minister, who threw such extravagant parties that the King had him imprisoned for life, and Galileo, who was clever enough not only to discover Jupiter's moons but to name them after the Medicis. "Do not fool yourself into thinking that life has changed much," Greene writes. Every trading desk, district office, or shop floor has its Sun King. You just need to figure out who it is.

This first law has achieved special resonance in the hip-hop community, which has adopted Greene's book as a hallowed text, and Greene himself as a kind of sage. Rappers and executives frequently cite other statutes as models for their industry maneuverings (Law 15: "Crush your enemy totally"; Law 21: "Play a sucker to catch a sucker"), but the first law's invocation of hierarchy seems to suit the image that rappers and their handlers have of themselves and their line—that they are knights who must abide by a code. Greene is their Capellanus.

Six years ago, the rapper Busta Rhymes was working on the film "Halloween: Resurrection," the eighth in the series. His acting coach gave him a special copy of "The 48 Laws" as a gift, with his name inscribed on the cover. One of the production executives had been making what some in the cast and crew considered unreasonable demands, and it occurred to Busta Rhymes, as he consulted the book in his trailer, that, as he recalled recently, "the way you had to approach him, when you were objecting to something he was saying, was to make it like he was always right. Bingo: 'Never outshine the master.'" In time, "Halloween" was indeed resurrected, and thirty million dollars were grossed. (At least one master—John Carpenter, the director of the first "Halloween"—was not outshone.) By then, Rhymes had come to feel that almost every situation in his life had a power law that suited it. For example, a friend recommended him to a casting agent for a role in "Shaft," and, when Rhymes got a part and the friend did not, the friend surreptitiously tried to sabotage him. "Instead of reacting as I would've, I just kept cool," Rhymes told me. "I showed my appreciation. I am now an enemy of this person, but he doesn't know it. I know where that person's malicious energy lies. I get to use this person like a puppet on a string." (Law 2: "Never put too much trust in friends, learn how to use enemies.") Meanwhile, Law 10 ("Avoid the unhappy and unlucky") encouraged him to jettison other friends—the criminally inclined, say. "This friend brings his dirt in from the street and gets it in your shit," Rhymes observed. Loyalty, it turned out, was overrated. For a time, he sensed that he had esoteric knowledge, a competitive edge: "I felt like I had some Deep Sea scroll or some shit."

About the same time, the book began to make the rounds at Def Jam records, circulating first among the managerial class, before filtering up (or down) to the artists. Chris Lighty, who manages Busta Rhymes and 50 Cent, and who might therefore be inclined to refer to each of them, publicly at least, as his master, still bestows that honor on his old Def Jam mentor Lyor Cohen, another early adopter. When Lighty first came across the book, he joked that Cohen had written it—that Robert Greene didn't exist.

Greene does exist, although perhaps not in the state of diabolical radiance that his admirers sometimes imagine. They instruct their people to arrange



Robert Greene with his acolytes 50 Cent, Kanye West, Jay-Z, and Busta Rhymes.

meetings with Mr. Greene, and they end up encountering an understated, somewhat geeky guy whose implementation of his own teachings is, if anything, very subtle. Whether by design or by nature, his reserve comes off as self-possession, and his reputation remains undiminished. “He’s the Jedi master, that’s for sure,” Lighty says.

Greene is forty-seven years old and lives in Los Angeles. He began writing “The 48 Laws” in the mid-nineties, after having held, by his count, eighty jobs, none of which brought him any power, except that which accrues from observation and experience. The book has sold more than eight hundred thousand copies in the U.S. and another million worldwide, and has been translated into twenty languages (including Latvian and Arabic but not French). It is in some ways just an exhaustive collation of the work of other sages, such as Machiavelli and Sun Tzu—whose “Art of War” was espoused by Hollywood and hip-hop, too. But its frank and ruthless approach, and its easy digest of admonishments—some innocuous (“Always say less than necessary”; “Keep your hands clean”) and some less so (“Pose as a friend, work as a spy”; “Keep others in suspended terror”)—make it seem like some kind of gospel. The design is stately, with great-man quotes in the margins, in red ink. Greene would say that the laws are not so much pieces of advice as they are observations of behavior—the fruit of research, if not quite revelation. “If the world is like a giant scheming court and we are trapped inside it, there is no use in trying to opt out of the game,” Greene writes. “That will only render you powerless, and powerlessness will make you miserable.”

Greene’s next two books, “The Art of Seduction,” a lush guide to inveigling, published in 2001 (the marginalia are lavender-hued), and “The 33 Strategies of War,” a concordance of tactical thinking, published last winter, sold well, too. Not surprisingly, some people find all the books sinister or upsetting, in that they basically tell you how to be a creep, albeit a happy and successful one. But Greene’s way of seeing the world—play or be played—has earned him a ragtag apostolate, which includes the T-shirt magnate Dov Charney (who says of Greene, “I call him Jesus”), the Knicks guard Stephon Marbury (his copy of “The 48 Laws” came from a friend of his brother’s, who encountered it in prison; “It’s an inspiration from somewhere else,” Marbury told me), and the producer Brian Grazer (“There was a time Mike Ovitz was one of my agents, and I didn’t understand him, but when I saw this book I began to understand how he used power”), as well as rappers like Kanye West, Jay-Z, and 50 Cent: people who, by position or disposition, must think a little harder to identify someone whom they’d be comfortable calling master.

STEVE BRODNER

To Greene, the master is Machiavelli. “Of course, it doesn’t matter if I outshine him,” Greene told me recently. “But I’m not that presumptuous. I’m not on his level.”

Greene spent a week in New York in September, attending to various projects and disciples. The main event was a meeting with 50 Cent, the rapper and former crack dealer, who wants to collaborate with Greene on a street version of “The 48 Laws”: a slinger’s gloss on Castiglione. He is not the first to advance some variation on this idea. A dozen or so people have approached Greene with movie adaptations in mind. None of them made much sense to Greene, until a few weeks ago, when he met with Busta Rhymes, who proposed a feature film about a family who lives by the forty-eight laws. “It’s kind of Biblical,” Greene says. “ ‘The Godfather’ meets ‘East of Eden.’ ”

Greene has excellent posture and a muscular neck, a result in part of Pilates he has done over the years to counteract a chronic problem with his spine, but he walks with short steps and often wears a backpack, the straps snug on both shoulders, in a manner that suggests the furtive application of a kick-me sign. If he wore black pants and white shirts, instead of hipster jeans and untucked rayon shirts, you’d mistake him for a Mormon missionary. To see him crossing the street in the rain, with a tattered umbrella and puddle water soaking the cuffs of his jeans, is to witness firsthand the tendency for a sage to ignore his own precepts: in this case, Law 37 ("Create compelling spectacles") and Law 34 ("Be royal in your own fashion").

His meeting with 50 Cent was at the headquarters, in Chelsea, of Violator Management & Records, Chris Lighty's firm, where every employee is encouraged to read "The 48 Laws," and where no one can agree on who came across the book first. (An intern told me that she had been assigned the book in college.) A Violator partner named James (Cruz Control) Cruz cornered Greene and said, "I swear on everything that is dear to me. Call my wife and ask her where the book is in my house, and she will ask, 'Which one?' I have a copy in the den, one in the bedroom, one—and I mean no disrespect—in the bathroom." Greene laughed nervously and said, "Wow."

"I want to get drunk around you so that I can hear what you have to say," Cruz said. "You and Fiddy—it's a marriage of geniuses."

Interns and guests (among them two shy young Yankee stars, Melky Cabrera and Robinson Cano) milled around the office suite. Greene and 50 Cent found each other and exchanged greetings. Greene had expressed some anxiety, before this meeting, about how one should address 50 Cent: he didn't feel quite right saying "Fiddy." They had met once before and discovered that they had things in common, such as a tendency, in their youth, to carry around, and talk to, little green toy plastic soldiers, but, as Greene said, "There are disparities: I wasn't dealing drugs when I was eight years old."

Greene, Lighty, 50 Cent, and his literary agent, Marc Gerald, went into a conference room. 50 Cent sat with his back to a window, so that Greene faced the glare. The atmosphere was giddy, to suit 50 Cent's mood. "Chris takes all the credit for my work," 50 Cent said, referring to Lighty. "He's the dollar man. People say, '50 Cent, he can't possibly have come up with all that.'"

"Well, you know what?" Greene said. "We're going to change that."

50 Cent, wearing baggy jeans, a black T-shirt, and a black ball cap, has a warm smile and a gift for eye contact, and he began talking profusely and without apparent direction, as though relieved to be in the company of someone who could appreciate the tactical workings of his mind. The previous week, he had been arrested, on Thirty-fourth Street, for driving an unregistered Lamborghini in an erratic manner, and then, after being released, had got into a scrape at a fashion show, when a photographer refused to get out of the seat next to his. As 50 Cent related it now, presumably for the purposes of strategy evaluation, the photographer yielded only when 50 Cent stood over him, put his hand on the man's shoulder, and said, "Yo, get up."

"Law 49," Greene said, drolly.

"His perception of me is what got him up," 50 Cent went on. "The respect comes from two things: admiration and fear."

"It's better to be feared than loved."

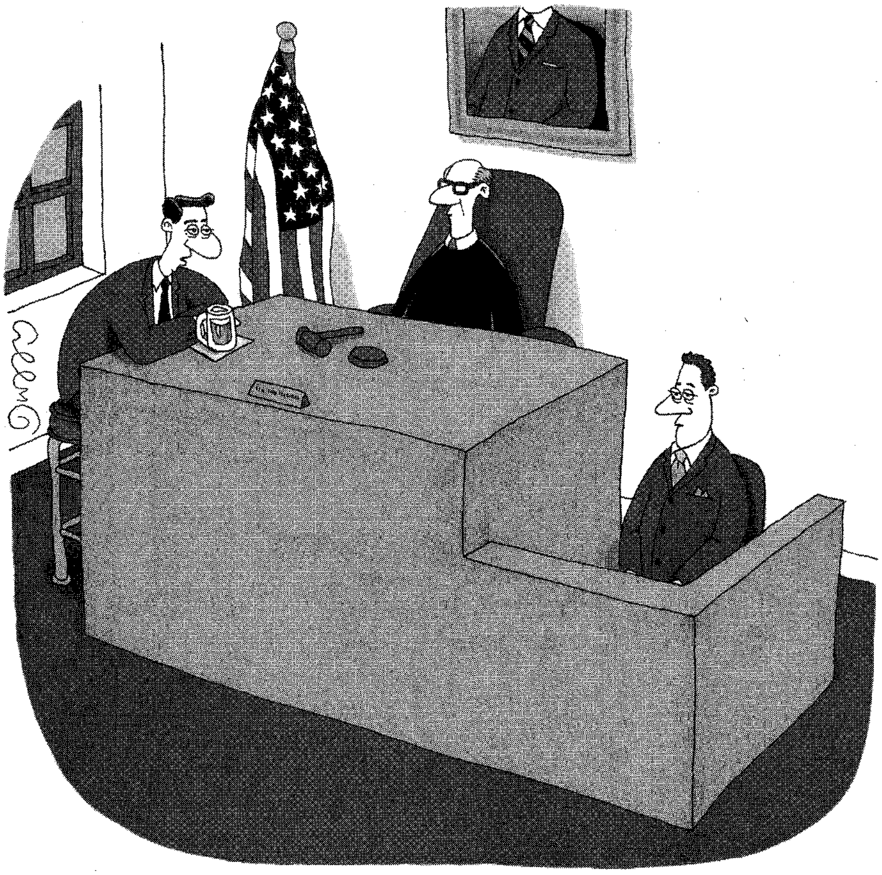
50 Cent grinned and said, "It makes it easier for me to continue to sell music. And my interest is really business, period."

50 Cent began to discuss certain strategic considerations in his career: how he must constantly beat back rival challenges, yet must sometimes also ignore them, so as not to legitimatize them; how people press him to do good works, when he knows that the image that sells is the opposite. He spends a great deal of time considering the workings of ill repute. "The way they buy you is the way you absolutely have to stay," he said. "It's better to be remembered than to not be remembered. What makes me unsure about this is not being able to control people's perceptions."

"People have a lot of envy," Greene said. "They try and bring people down. That's Law 46." ("Never appear too perfect: envy creates silent enemies." *See Rhymes, Busta.*)

50 Cent shook his head and said, "It must be amazing to hang out with you. All kind of shit must fall out your ass, in passing."

In this meeting, however, Greene said little, as 50 Cent held forth. It was unclear whether this was a reflection of tactics or of Greene's own intuitive sense of his place in this power firmament, in the presence of a charismatic but not wholly coherent power strategist (whose début album, incidentally, sold more copies in the United States in its first week than "The 48



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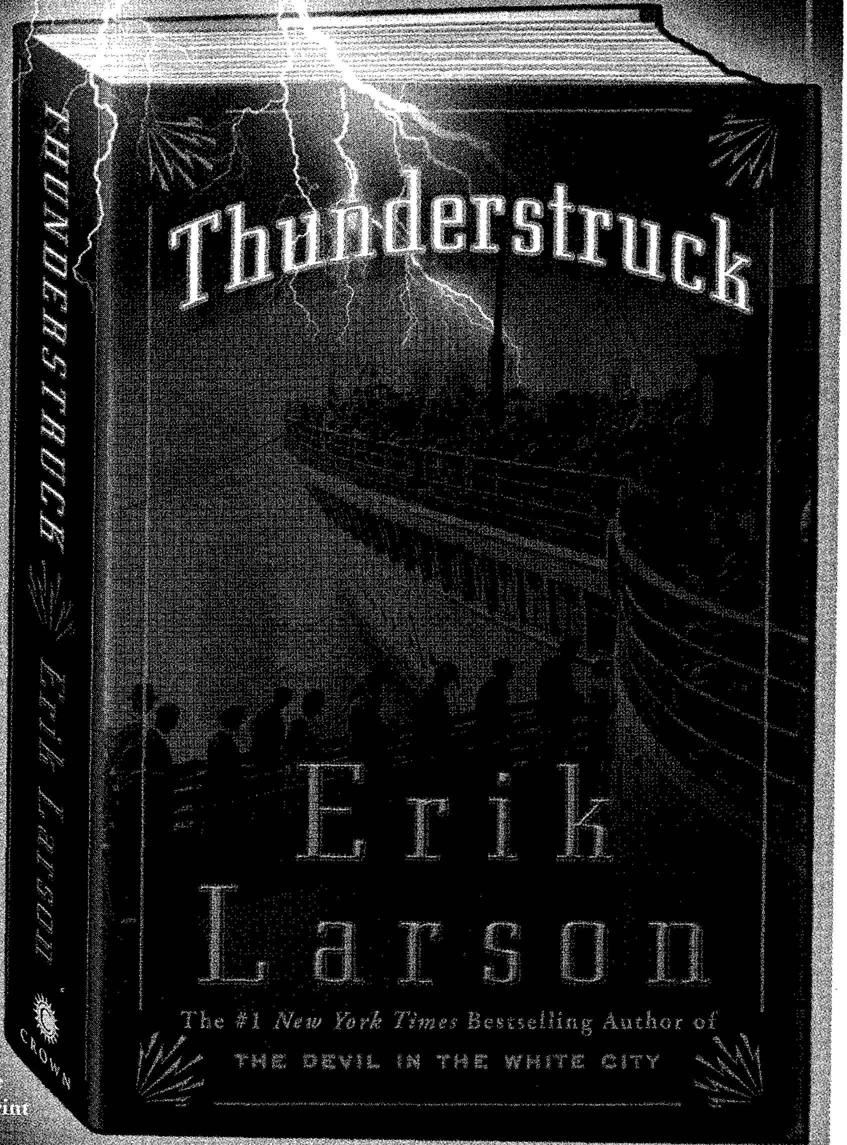
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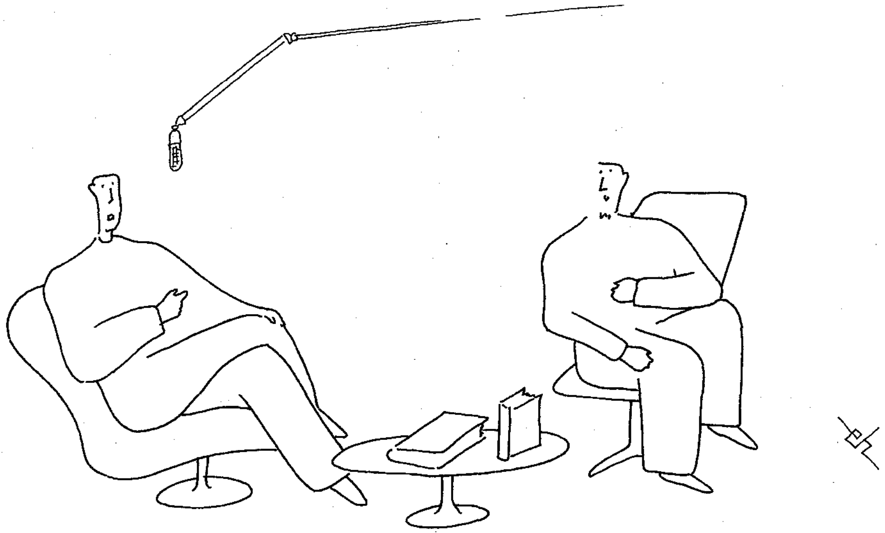

“I found your book ‘Canoeing the Small Puddles of Maine’ really stupid.”

• •

Laws” has sold here in four hundred and twenty-five weeks). Occasionally, 50 Cent stood to make a point, or mimicked a punch, or pounded the table, while Greene sat still, with a perplexed smile on his face. Almost nothing had been said about the book proposal that was supposed to come out of the meeting. This appeared to be an audience.

50 Cent had a story to tell about dealing drugs, one that involved his seizure of market share on a corner in Queens. The key tactical maneuver, it seemed, was robbing his competitors at gunpoint, while wearing a mask, and then giving away their product free. The chain of events that this set off revealed 50 Cent to be a man of prodigious foresight.

“What made you think of this?” Greene asked, with a note of admiration.

50 Cent beamed.

The rivalries and grievances in rap music, as in local politics or professional wrestling, can be hard to keep up with. The consequences are occasionally real—50 Cent has been stabbed, and once was shot nine times—but the beefs are not always entirely sincere. It’s a game, like any other where reputation is the coin of the realm—the corner, the court, the House of Representatives—and strategy is as integral to it as beats and rhymes. At one point, 50 Cent talked about how he had erred in letting a petulant rival off the hook.

“There’s a law in there for that,” 50 Cent said. “I shoulda just finished his ass.”

“Is that Machiavelli?” I asked.

“No, that’s me,” Greene said. “And Moses.”

“Crush your enemy totally”: 50 Cent wasn’t entirely clear on the implications. “You say destroy completely,” he said. “My problem is that I kind of begin to enjoy the destructive part, when I get ’em on the ropes. Because I enjoy it, I don’t quite know when to stop.”

“Right,” Greene replied. “What about Law 47? ‘In victory learn when to stop.’ In war, they call it the ‘culminating point of victory.’ You have to get to the sweet spot where you destroy them and then just walk away.”

After an hour and a half, 50 Cent’s representatives popped in to announce an imminent end to the meeting. And so, with the five minutes Greene had left, he tried to talk about their collaboration. He said, “Like I’ve done with Napoleon and Hannibal, I’d like to do with you.”

“You know how in your books you went back to, like, Moses and great war tactics?” 50 Cent said. “Whaddaya think of the concept of utilizing some of the activities from street gangsters? The right method in the wrong situations. We don’t want to give the message in the book ‘It’s O.K., you’re just doing business, if you blow someone’s head off.’ But the mentality and movement of it is the mentality and movement of good business. The negative charge travels faster than the positive charge.”

“Whenever you watch a movie you’re always more interested in the villain than the hero,” Greene said.

50 Cent concurred. “You root for the villain. It’s almost cinematic law.”

When Greene was a kid, in Brentwood, he and some of the boys on his street played a game they called Gestapo. Two boys, impersonating prison-camp escapees, would run off separately into the hills, and the others would give chase, with a bloodhound. “It was terrifying,” Greene told me. He suspects that, despite being the only Jewish boy in the group, he was the one who came up with the game.

Greene’s father, who died six years ago, sold cleaning supplies. His mother stayed home. (Greene talks to his mother nearly every other day. She goes into bookstores and asks for his books, and then reports back. He likes to tease her by threatening to write a book about Bozo the Clown, another area of interest. As he put it, “What about power, seduction, war . . . Bozo?”) Greene was a good student and something of a loner. He graduated early from high school and went to Berkeley, to study English literature, but one summer he took a crash course in ancient Greek—eight hours a day, for eight weeks. “I had a weird connection to ancient Greek,” he said. “I could almost understand it before I started studying it.” One of the Greek teachers was a professor at the University of Wisconsin and offered to help him get a scholarship there. “I hated Berkeley,” Greene says. “The hippie culture bugged me.” So he went to Madison.

Greene is what you might call a homegrown intellectual, and his house, a Spanish-style bungalow in Los Feliz, is filled with books, especially faded undergrad-era paperbacks. They are, fundamentally, his stock-in-trade, and there is little he’d rather do than sit with his cat, Brutus, underlining passages and organizing the salient ideas on color-coded note cards. A good book will generate thirty cards. This interest was of little use to him, however, in the days before “The 48 Laws,” when he wandered from project to project, waiting for something to take. He wrote online encyclopedia entries on philosophy, and at one point worked as a skip tracer, finding people over the phone. “It was all about deception," he said. "You had to act like someone who knows them."

Really, Greene, like everyone else in a twenty-mile radius, was trying to make it as a screenwriter. He wrote TV treatments (spontaneous combustion, alien sightings) and film scripts (a hippie inherits a pile of money, a real-estate scheme). A couple of them were optioned but never made, and over time he accumulated enough experience as gum on the industry's shoe to witness some of the power maneuvers that were practiced up and down the line. One day, a film producer told him, "You should be writing for the theatre"—"Go to hell," in Los Angelese. So he did. He wrote a half-dozen plays, including one, "Drab Bard," which had a palindrome structure: in the middle of the play, the story reverses, and descends into surrealistic nonsense. "People didn't know what to make of it," Greene said.

Greene spent much of his twenties living in Europe, teaching or writing or scraping by. London, Crete, Barcelona. In Paris, he got a job as a receptionist at the Hôtel Saint-André-des-Arts, in the Latin Quarter. To obtain working papers, he had pretended that he was Irish, accent and all. Borrowing from James Joyce, he invented a childhood on Gardiner Street, in Dublin, which, unbeknownst to him, had become a red-light district. He had a girlfriend from New York, and at one point she took him home, to Douglaston, Queens, to her parents, who were Irish-American and thrilled to meet a real Irishman. "It spiralled into this interesting and then irritating adventure that lasted for many years," Greene recalled.

It was in Paris that he learned to appreciate the seduction game. Another girlfriend introduced him to Laclos's novel "Les Liaisons Dangereuses," a key text. "I'm fascinated by courtesans and gold-diggers," he told me. "A woman who can use intelligence and strategy to get a man, who can treat a seduction like a military campaign—it just excites me." Most of the people who seek his counsel, however, are men looking for pickup tricks. ("Victim" is his word for the object of a seduction.) One executive called on him, ostensibly for power advice, but it became clear that what the man really wanted was an affair with his secretary. "I could have told him in a second how to go about it," Greene said. "But he was married and had a family and it would probably have really screwed up his life, so I advised him to seduce someone else, as far from his office as possible."

Greene is a friend of the writer Neil Strauss, who last year published a pickup-artist book called "The Game," and Strauss introduced him to the Izen twins, Brianne and Brittany, aspiring starlets and writers whom Greene likens to the Gabor and the Hilton sisters. The Izens are working on a television series they call "Gold-Diggers," which chronicles their efforts to ensnare rich, older men. Greene has been giving them advice. "Robert's a genius," Brianne told me. "When we first met him, he called us 'amateurs.'"

Greene is not a libertine. Drawing upon a list of the nine seducer types in his book (the Coquette, the Charmer, the Dandy, the Natural, etc.), he is, as he told me, "a reformed Rake." (Reformed rakes live in constant danger of recidivism.) He lives with his girlfriend, Anna Biller, a filmmaker and old-Hollywood fetishist, on whom he practiced some of the tactics suggested in "The Art of Seduction." Having seen her around Santa Monica, he got himself invited to a party at her house, where he slipped away to study her record collection. Afterward, he invited her to a Debussy opera that he knew would appeal to her. Still, the victim resisted. So he asked her to his thirty-seventh birthday party. He also invited seven other attractive women, friends who, at his bidding, did little to dispel the impression that they might be sleeping with him. It worked. He and Biller have been together for ten years.

Greene comes across as both reserved and sincere, a canny question-asker and embarrassment-revealer—a regular guy. He professes not to be a practitioner of his own power rules, but you can never quite shake the feeling that you may be a victim. His books, which are full of ploys and deceptions, induce mistrust. I had noticed on the acknowledgments page of "The 48 Laws" that his parents' name didn't have the "e" on the end. He said that after college he worked at *Esquire*, and wanted to differentiate himself from other Greens. (His author bio in "The 48 Laws" says that he was an editor at *Esquire;* in fact, he was an assistant.) Later, he decided that he couldn't remember where or when he'd added the "e."

The day I visited his house, Greene and I shot pool in his garage. (He drives

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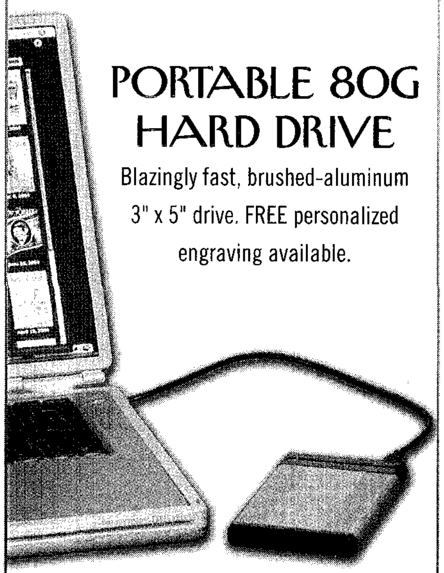

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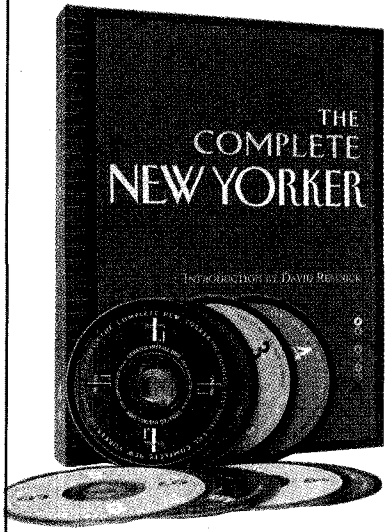

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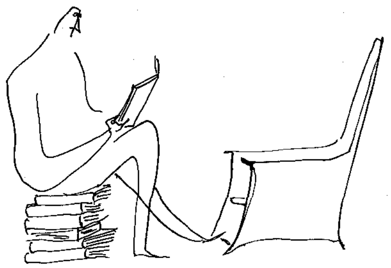
a beat-up Toyota Avalon, in a halting manner that would fail to get even 50 Cent arrested.) Greene is an avid player, and I am a terrible one, but somehow I won two games in a row, which led me to suspect that he'd let me win, which in turn had me second-guessing his every gesture. He had Biller show me a scene from a film she'd just finished, called "Viva," about a bored housewife, circa 1972. (Biller was the writer, director, editor, and lead actress.) She had an old editing machine in the garage, so we crowded in and she cued up a sequence in which her character strips naked and takes a bath, while paging through a hard-core skin magazine. When the scene ended, Greene said, "This is where everything starts to turn a little tawdry." I wasn't sure what to think.

While in New York, Greene, in defiance of Law 40 ("Despise the free lunch"), stayed in one of several apartments belonging to Dov Charney, who owns American Apparel. Charney reckons that he has bought four hundred copies of "The 48 Laws," which he calls "the Bible for atheists." (He likes to give the book to employees when he fires them.) Charney also keeps Greene on retainer, as a kind of rabbi, to help him chart a course beyond the mere manufacture of apparel toward some measure of cultural supremacy. Greene helps Charney think through decisions and predicaments. Charney is known now chiefly for his relatively progressive labor practices and his aggressive libertinism (a female reporter from *Jane* wrote that he masturbated eight times in her presence), but in his concupiscent charisma Greene sees the potential for greatness. "I want him to be the Hugh Hefner of his generation," Greene told me. Charney would prefer to be thought of as its Jack Welch.

One evening, I spent a few hours with them in another one of Charney's apartments. If Greene is Jesus, Charney acted as his Paul, holding forth, unabated, for two hours, while Greene sat silently on the floor, in a lotus pose. A young woman lay in a corner taking occasional tokes off a joint. "I believe the laws to be divine," Charney said. "There may be fifty-one laws, there may be thirty-six. They may have existed before language itself."

The physics of striving are subject to certain principles, and blaming Greene for pointing this out is, in Charney's view, absurd. "He's like Newton: Newton didn't invent gravity," Charney said. "Why should Robert be responsible for the imperfections of humanity?" The book serves as validation for those already practicing its precepts. It also abets defenses. In an unjust world, where the social order is apparently determined not by virtue or merit but by the inscrutable workings of clashing self-interests, it is thrilling to hear that there may be a secret code for the recognition and manipulation of these interests—a set of universal procedures for advancement.

How far the genre goes back depends on your definition of it. Certainly, anyone looking to get ahead could have found, as Greene has, something salutary in the writings of Aristotle or Epicurus, or in the Book of Exodus. There was a whole medieval Persian genre, called the Mirror for Princes, about practicing statecraft. The modern era may well begin in 1859, with "Self-Help," by a Scottish reformer named Samuel Smiles, who preached positive thinking. But the best exemplar may have been Napoleon Hill, who, in 1908, as a twenty-five-year-old law-school dropout, got an assignment to write a magazine story about Andrew Carnegie. Believing that he had identified a formula for success, Carnegie encouraged Hill to interview hundreds of other rich and powerful people in order to fill it out. One result was a book called "Law of Success" (Hill had sixteen lessons); another was success itself. In 1937, he published "Think and Grow Rich," which is still in print and has sold more than a hundred million copies. (Hill also coined countless dad-ready dicta, such as "A quitter never wins and a winner never quits.") The thirties were self-improvement's first of many boom decades. It was in 1936 that Dale Carnegie (no relation to Andrew) published "How to Win Friends and Influence People" and with it began doing just that.



Greene doesn't mention any modern forerunners in his books. He does not consider himself their heir. I once asked Greene about Michael Korda, whose 1975 book "Power! How to Get It, How to Use It," an instructive, if somewhat satirical, roundup of devious maneuvers, became a primer to the proto-yuppie set, and Greene claimed not to have heard of him. He'd rather dwell on Kierkegaard or Kissinger. This may be so for Greene's readers as well. The game seems less petty or low when you can consider your little turf wars or office politics in terms of the grand maneuvers of Napoleon, Hannibal, or Mazarin. There is a long and well-established American tradition of adorning ill-begotten gains and undernourished minds with classical and Continental accoutrements: Doric columns, a Bentley, the compleat works. In a way, Greene's parables are a form of aspirational camouflage.

Quincy Jones III, the son of the music producer, is making a documentary about "The 48 Laws" and their ubiquity in the "urban realm." Jones's working thesis is that hip-hop has evolved beyond its gangster period, which was exemplified by its fixation with the movie "Scarface," into a more mature phase, for which the cold-eyed but buttoned-up ethos of "The 48 Laws" is better suited. Tony Montana gives way to Talleyrand. It is a business now, not a street fight, but one with mythmaking prerequisites. "I view it as more of an empowerment tool than as a way to screw people," Jones told me. "A lot of the feuds in hip-hop stem from misunderstandings in business. When Cam'ron went at Jay-Z recently, said a bunch of things, derogatory comments, Jay-Z, instead of coming back at him, just ignored him. He won the battle by default." He added, "Maybe if Biggie and Tupac had read this book, we would've had a different outcome." They might have shown each other their appreciation and pretended to be friends.

Another one of Greene's fans is Karrine Steffens, a.k.a. Superhead, who slept with a host of hip-hop celebrities and then wrote a book about them, "Confessions of a Video Vixen," which, owing in large part to explicit accounts of bedroom proclivities and shortcomings (Law 28:

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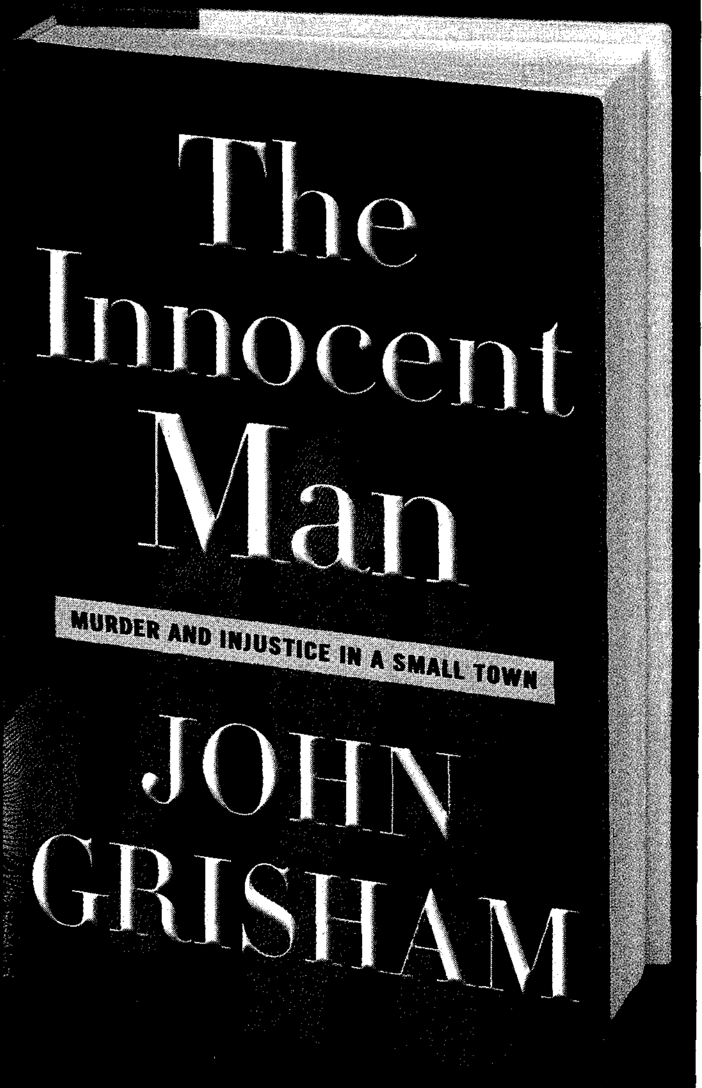

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"Enter action with boldness"), has sold about a half million copies. She initially got "The 48 Laws" from the rapper Method Man ("Having the book and applying it are two different things," she told me pointedly), and keeps it next to her bed, with the works of Ernest Hemingway, Edgar Allan Poe, and Suze Orman. (She professes to have no need for "The Art of Seduction.") She also has the laws up on her refrigerator. "My whole career is based on Law 21: 'Play a sucker to catch a sucker,'" she told me. "I love to play stupid. Even though I might be prancing around in my underwear or popping my gum like an idiot, I'm paying attention to everything you're saying." Her favorite law is Law 48: "Assume formlessness." During our conversation, she cited it, along with Law 35 ("Master the art of timing") and Law 4 ("Always say less than necessary"), with regard to a predicament she'd found herself in: that week, she'd been hounded by the press as the woman who'd broken up the marriage of Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown. She had said nothing publicly so far. "I'll bide my time, stay silent," she said. This impulse came naturally to her, but the tacit approval of Han Fei-tzu, Otto von Bismarck, and Cardinal de Retz, if not of her media advisers, gave her strength. "Some of us are lionesses, and some of us are not," she said.

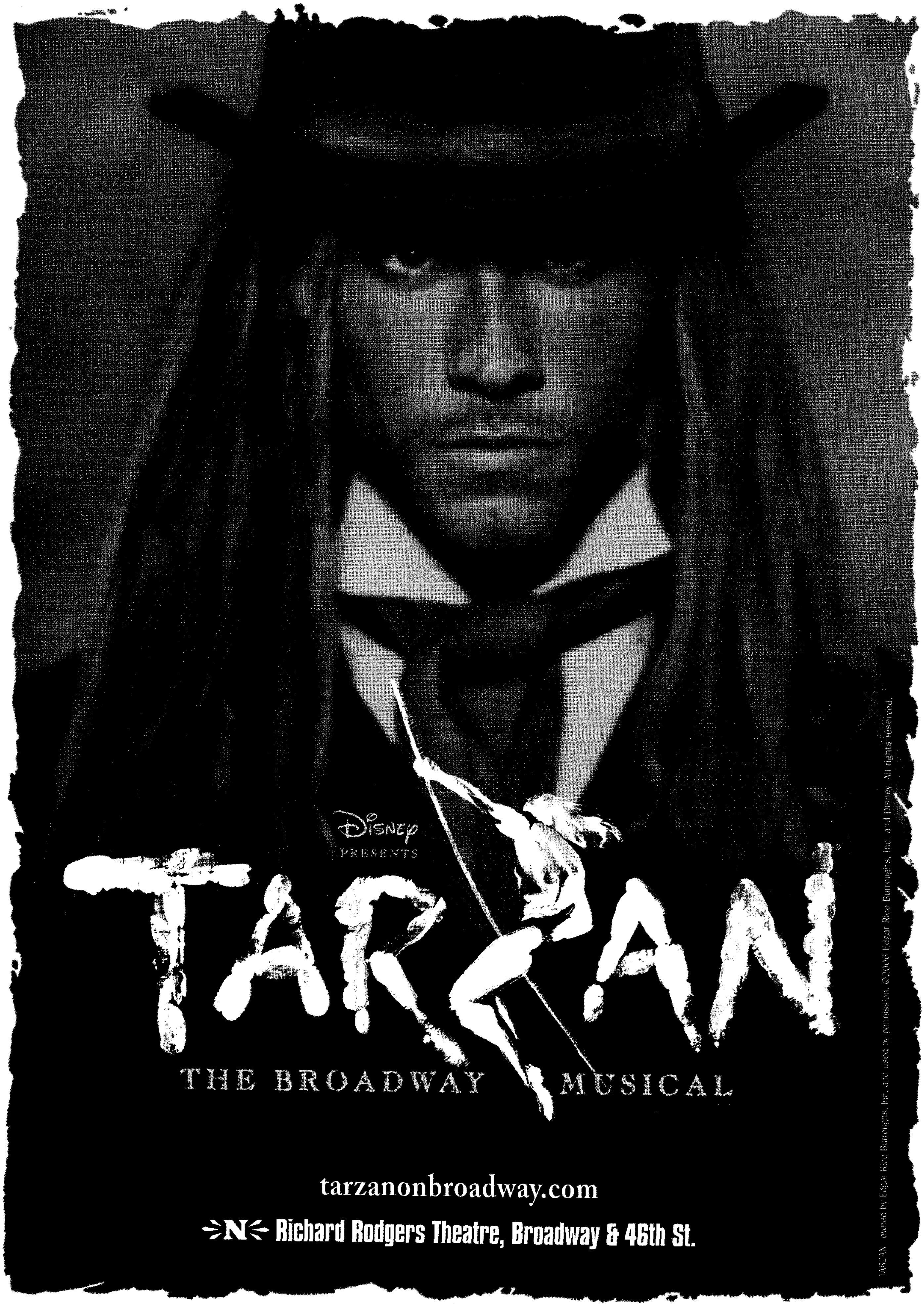
Another master, whom Greene has perhaps allowed himself to outshine, is Joost Elffers, whose name adorns the covers of the three books, and who is credited, rather mysteriously, as their producer. He is also mistaken, frequently (and to Greene's irritation), as their co-author.

In 1995, Greene was in Italy, serving as an adviser at Fabrica, a new art and media school, near Venice, founded by Luciano Benetton and Oliviero Toscani. A friend introduced Greene to Elffers, a Dutch designer who had recently achieved success as the producer of a book called "The Secret Language of Birthdays," which comprised three hundred and sixty-five fulsome personality profiles. One day, Greene and Elffers went for a walk along the Riva degli Schiavoni. Elffers asked Greene if he had any book ideas. The honest answer would have been "Not really," but Greene began to talk about one of his pet subjects, the court of Louis XIV, and then about Machiavelli. Elffers was intrigued. They fixed on the idea of a book about power, and Elffers wrote out twelve postdated checks, one per month. Now, as Elffers put it, "Robert could sit on a mattress on the floor and read a thousand books" without having to worry about money.

Elffers eventually took the project to Viking Penguin (although—power move—not until it was nearly done, so as to minimize the potential for publisher interference). "The 48 Laws of Power" sold for four hundred and fifty thousand dollars, of which Elffers got half. (The split for the next two books, each of which sold for three hundred and fifty thousand dollars, was weighted in Greene's favor. They share the royalties fifty-fifty.) Elffers encouraged Greene to cultivate an attitude of distrust toward the publishers. "It's about intimidation," Elffers told me. "It's a battle against the numbness of people who go to meetings." ("Neither of us live by these rules, although we are clearly not naïve," he added.)

I met Elffers one day at his house in Greenwich Village. Elffers is fifty-nine years old, and ascribes some of his own familiarity with the mechanics of power, war, and seduction to his parents' experiences in the resistance in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam (his mother was Jewish), and to three decades he has spent on the downtown New York art scene. (His wife is the artist Pat Steir.) He wore a light-brown thin-wale corduroy suit and webbed-leather loafers, and had the impish hauteur of an aesthete accustomed to getting his way.

"The book for me is an engine," he said. "My role is to build the engine." The main component is the book's design, which is essentially Elffers's. The cover's genesis was a source of some sour feelings at Viking Penguin. The art director spent weeks developing a cover, and then Elffers showed up for a meeting with his own version, in a brown paper bag. "They came up with a cover, and I showed them mine, and the whole meeting was over in one second," Elffers said. ("Joost didn't have to do that," the book's editor, Molly Stern, recalled. "I wouldn't let that situation happen again. I have a lot more power now, by the way.") Elffers's cover was modelled on

DISNEY PRESENTS

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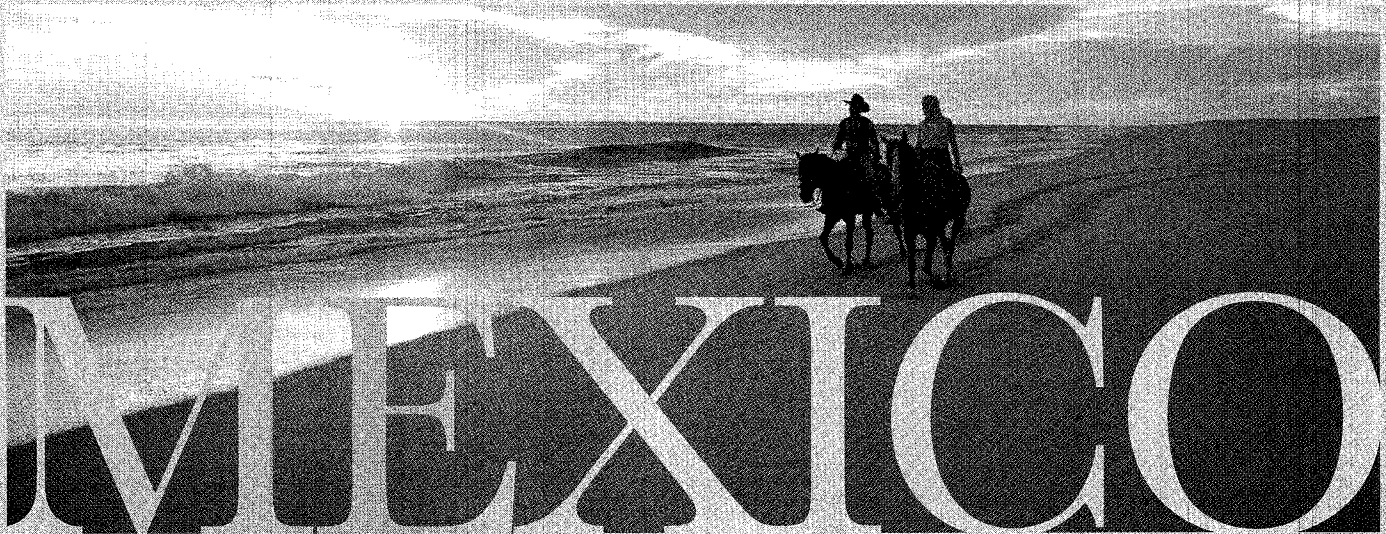

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the heraldic shield of Amsterdam: two vertical red stripes flank a royal-blue one, and in the middle, in place of Amsterdam's three stars, the word "Power," reading top to bottom. "It is an amoral design," Elffers told me. (You might say that the cover of "Seduction," an elongated pink ovoid on a black background, has an anatomical design.)

For the genre, "Power" is long (four hundred and fifty pages) and dense (allusions to everyone from Abraham to Zhang Yu), but the chapters break down into modular sections, delineated by red or black type. "You can enter it anywhere," Elffers said. The engine is designed to transport softheads as well as future Presidents and kings. The prose is insistent, simple, and portentous. To pick one example: "In 1514 the twenty-two-year-old Pietro Aretino was working as a lowly assistant scullion to a wealthy Roman family. He had ambitions of greatness as a writer, to enflame the world with his name, but how could a mere lackey hope to realize such dreams?"

Elffers hopes and believes that the book should resist modish redesign. (Most foreign editions mimic the American edition, although the Russian cover features a chess piece shackled to a ball and chain.) It aspires to timelessness—or at least to a long and lucrative residency on Penguin's backlist. "This book is built for a century in print," Elffers told me. "It has no time or place. It is from all cultures. It roams three thousand years of history."

Originally, Greene wrote fifty-two laws, although now, in his eagerness to foster the impression that they were writ in stone, he is reluctant to admit this. The publishers felt that fifty-two was not a good number—too pat an invocation of weeks in a year or cards in a deck. Greene relented, integrating the four extraneous laws (for example, "Create an air of mystery" and "Stay above the fray") into the others. Greene considered the book a work of philosophy, but Elffers told me, "I said to Robert, 'The best place for our books is in the business section.' Robert almost vomited."

One evening, Greene asked me to read Chapter 30 in "The 33 Strategies of War," because, as he said, "that's where I kind of reveal myself." The chapter, called "Penetrate Their Minds: Communication Strategies," urges the aspiring warrior to lure "people into coming to the conclusions you desire and into thinking they've gotten them by themselves." Greene's models here are Alfred Hitchcock, Socrates, and, of course, Machiavelli, who in this telling resurrects his career by writing a bold, amoral treatise, full of anecdotes and aphorisms, which works its way into the halls of power. It is clear enough that Greene is writing about himself; less clear is what, or how much, this reveals about him. "Over the centuries millions upon millions of readers have used Machiavelli's books for invaluable advice on power," Greene writes. "But could it possibly be the opposite—that it is Machiavelli who has been using his readers?"

If a book like Greene's is an engine, its primary function, you could say, is the aggrandizement of its author, and its readers are instruments in the writer's bid for whatever it is—power, success, money, immortality—that he is supposedly helping them to acquire. People who write about how to get such things often have very little of them themselves, at least before sales take off.

"I start with a nobody and work with him for years," Elffers told me. "The subject and the way it is done are bigger than the writer. Now the writer is climbing the mountain on the shadowy side and one day will stand on top of it, and on top of his own book. Right now more people know the book than the guy. But that is changing. The moment he is asked for comment about why Israel has lost in Lebanon, then he is on top of his own book."

Elffers and Greene are no longer working together, although they may again someday. "I have said to Robert that the debt he had to me was paid," Elffers said. " 'I'm not your pimp. Now we are free from each other.' " Greene has an agent now, Michael Carlisle, who described his new client's relationship with Elffers as "a marriage that wasn't finished, although its light and heat had been exhausted."

Greene told me, "When I did the books, people were telling me, 'Careful with that Joost guy. Ask for more money here, blah blah blah.' And I said, 'This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I'm going to get what I need out of it, and I'll never have to work another shit job in my life.' Now I have a friend for

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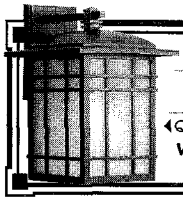

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life, and I have my three books. I believe in grand strategy."

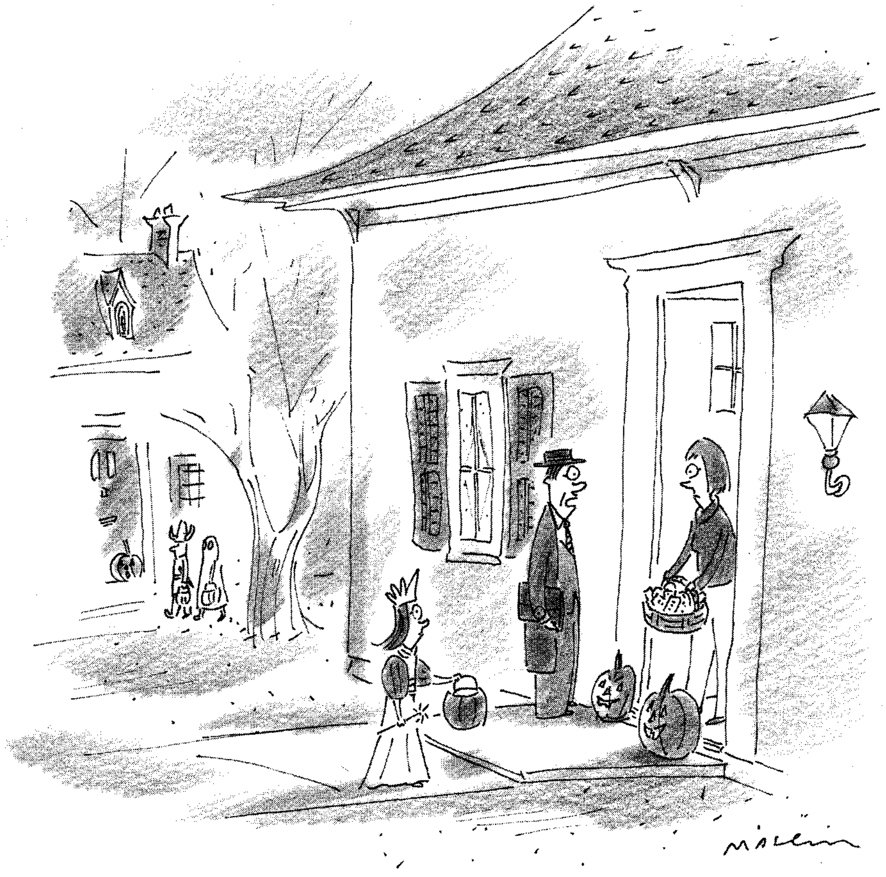
He went on, "I carry around this image of myself as a marginalized figure in New York and Hollywood, who owes much of his success to luck—the luck of meeting Joost, and so on. When I go deeper into it, yes, there was luck, but there was also design. I was like the narrator in 'Notes from the Underground.' When this opportunity came, I was able to draw upon the anger and hostility I felt toward how people had acted toward me. But I was strategic—with Joost, with Penguin, with everything."

Greene has several new books in mind: a unified-field theory of power, seduction, and war; the one with 50 Cent; and one on the idea of the sublime. Writing time, however, is harder to come by. He is bombarded with propositions and side projects, and his role as a paid adviser, which he says that he did not seek, has grown, taking in a curious cross-section of American ambition. An executive at Microsoft has enlisted him to help the company in its war with Google. He writes a monthly career-strategy column for *Maxim.* There are occasional detours on the speaking circuit. Recently, a friend of Phil Angelides, who is running against Arnold Schwarzenegger for governor of California, met with Greene to discuss whether he might have ideas for the campaign, but nothing came of it. Still, he's eager to get into politics. Despite the occasional warm welcome from right-wing talk radio ("I have a good rapport with G. Gordon Liddy," he told me), Greene is a lifelong liberal, one whose frustration over the Democratic Party's tactics reaches back to the Clinton era. "I'd like to be the Karl Rove of the Democratic Party," Greene says.

Then there are hip-hop's social and professional lures. Greene is nonchalant but susceptible. One night in Los Angeles, I went along with Greene and Quincy Jones III to a party celebrating the release of a new album by Ludacris. It was held at Social Hollywood, a lounge on Sunset. Ludacris and his manager, Chaka Zulu, a "48 Laws" fanatic, were expecting him. As Castiglione wrote, "Therefore I should wish our courtier to . . . insure that whenever he has to go where he is a stranger, he is preceded by a good reputation." The music was loud, so people had to shout to be not quite heard. They performed a nearly wordless pantomime of congratulatory fellowship: embrace, stand still for the camera, embrace again, release. From the number of guests hunched over their BlackBerries, you got the impression that everyone was communicating by text message, as though the room were full of invisible carrier pigeons. Greene borrowed a Treo to check his email, but had received only spam. One by one, members of the Ludacris entourage came to pay their respects to Mr. Greene. "I've seen the principles work!" "First time I read it, I didn't understand it. Then I got a bit older and I was, like, 'Oh man, that shit is right.'" Greene listened patiently, with just the right amount of embarrassment and pride.

The elder Quincy Jones arrived, with a pair of very young women, and as he posed for photographs his bearing, stout but sly, made it clear that he had no need to solicit any advice. Greene exhibited some ingenuousness by asking Jones whether one of the girls was his wife. (The short answer was no.) Then the younger Jones introduced Greene to Joe Francis, the creator of the "Girls Gone Wild" series. Francis's bearing was frenetic, at once overly familiar and eerily remote. After he turned away, Greene observed, "He's got nothing behind his eyes."

Later, Jones recalled meeting Greene for the first time. "I was surprised he was the guy who wrote these potent books," Jones said. "But as we started talking I began to see a lot of different layers, a lot of surprises." As a practitioner, Jones said, "he might be so good we don't even see it. You're never quite sure." Jones has come to prize Greene's advice, in matters large and small, and suggested that the best way to get a glimpse of Greene's brilliance would be to ask him about current events, to get his opinion on what each side should do. So later, thinking of Elffers, I asked Greene about Israel and Lebanon, and he replied, "Israel's bombing campaign was such a political mistake. War is politics now. This is what the Americans don't understand, the Israelis used to understand, and Hezbollah understands so well." And Iraq? "What would Napoleon or Rommel or Grant or Hannibal say?" Greene said. "They'd be appalled." The writer climbs the mountain. ♦



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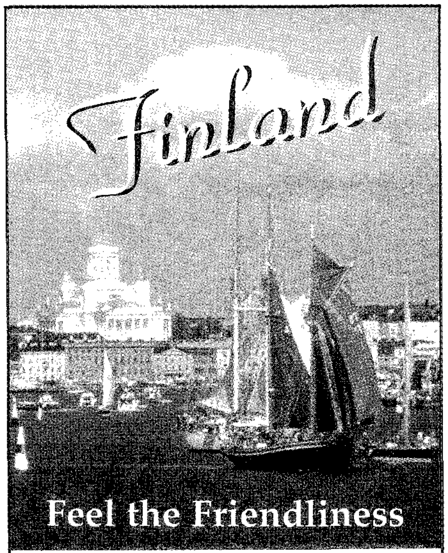

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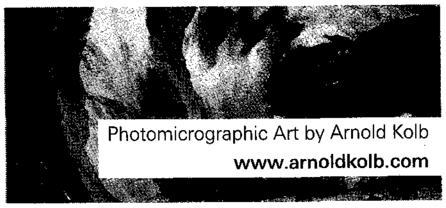
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OF COURSE

BY JOHN KENNEY

So what you have is not "stay the course," but, in fact, a study in constant motion.
—*Tony Snow, the White House press secretary, October 23rd.*

A strategy room, the White House. Two senior-level Presidential strategists sit with two Madison Avenue creatives.

STRATEGIST 1: Thank you for coming.

MAD MAN 1: Excited to be here.

MAD MAN 2: There are guys on the roof with guns.

STRATEGIST 2: We know.

STRATEGIST 1: We're here to talk messaging.

MAD MAN 1: "Stay the course."

STRATEGIST 1: Please don't use those words again in this building.

STRATEGIST 2: Tang? We have Tang and Chips Ahoy over on the credenza if anyone wants. Please help yourself.

STRATEGIST 1: What's our message? That's a rhetorical question to myself. The message is, in broad strokes, "We know the course, we've seen the course, we've been on the course many, many times, but the course has changed a little, in part because it's a very big course and it's almost impossible to keep an eye on the whole course and this kind of funny thing happened while we looked away for a minute or were out of town, say, or went on vacation for a while, and what happened was someone—unbeknownst to us and, frankly, without the proper permit—built, like, a detour in the course that took people off course and led them, quite by accident, to, like, a huge bomb factory, but we're working to shut that bomb factory down and reroute the course back to the original course, which, you have to trust us, goes by some wonderful scenery." We need that in four words.

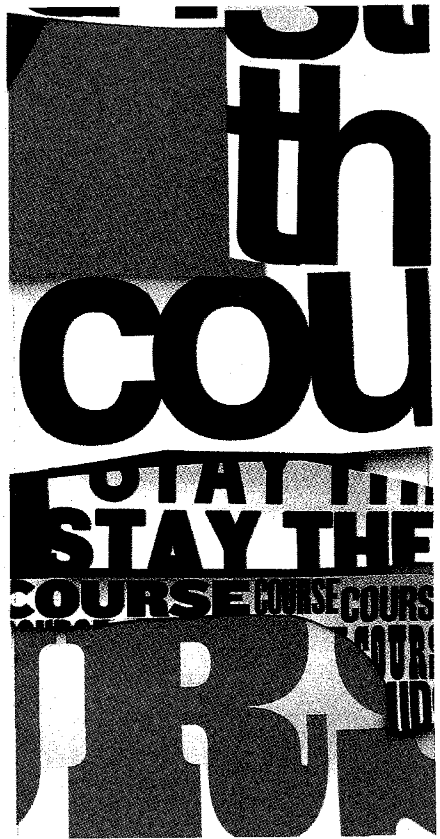
STRATEGIST 2: Without the literal mention of the words "bomb," "factory," or "stay."

STRATEGIST 1: You've got one hour. Mr. Snow has a press conference to announce the new course. The ideal line says as little as possible.

MAD MAN 1: Understood.

MAD MAN 2: What about something like "Stay *near* the course"?

MAD MAN 1: Interesting. The current course is perceived as negative but still necessary . . .



LAURIE ROSENWALD

STRATEGIST 1: . . . and "near" gives you options away from the course.

STRATEGIST 2: I had a thought. What about—and I know it's longish—"Hey, you guys, look at the cool course over there. How 'bout we go there instead of this course with the dead bodies on it?"?

MAD MAN 1: I like that it's colloquial.

MAD MAN 2: Human. Friendly. Or how about "Why *stay* when you can go?"?

STRATEGIST 1: Sounds like an exit-strategy line.

MAD MAN 2: He's right.

MAD MAN 1: You're right. What if it were "What remains is what was started. Only different"?

STRATEGIST 1: That's interesting.

STRATEGIST 2: That's very interesting.

STRATEGIST 1: It's vague without being completely obtuse.

MAD MAN 1: BP uses the line "Beyond petroleum." Why not something like "Beyond staying"?

MAD MAN 2: "Beyond the course."

MAD MAN 1: "Beyond staying the course."

STRATEGIST 1: I *love* that. [*To Strategist 2*] Did you hear that?

STRATEGIST 2: This Tang is warm.

MAD MAN 1: "Beyond staying the course."

STRATEGIST 2: That's very good.

STRATEGIST 1: Good. This is good. But what else? What other directions?

MAD MAN 2: I find the war so serious. It's such a downer.

MAD MAN 1: Huge downer.

STRATEGIST 1: It tests very poorly.

MAD MAN 2: What about something lighter. "What happens in Baghdad stays in Baghdad."

STRATEGIST 2: I like that a *lot*.

STRATEGIST 1: That's very interesting.

MAD MAN 1: What about something just incredibly, like, almost poetic . . . like a . . . a . . .

MAD MAN 2: . . . a haiku . . .

MAD MAN 1: . . . a haiku. Exactly. I'm thinking, like, "Of course."

MAD MAN 2: I love that.

STRATEGIST 1: It's different.

STRATEGIST 2: It's short. POTUS likes short.

MAD MAN 1: It's pithy.

MAD MAN 2: Don't use "pithy." POTUS thinks pithy means "dirty."

STRATEGIST 1: "Of course." Interesting.

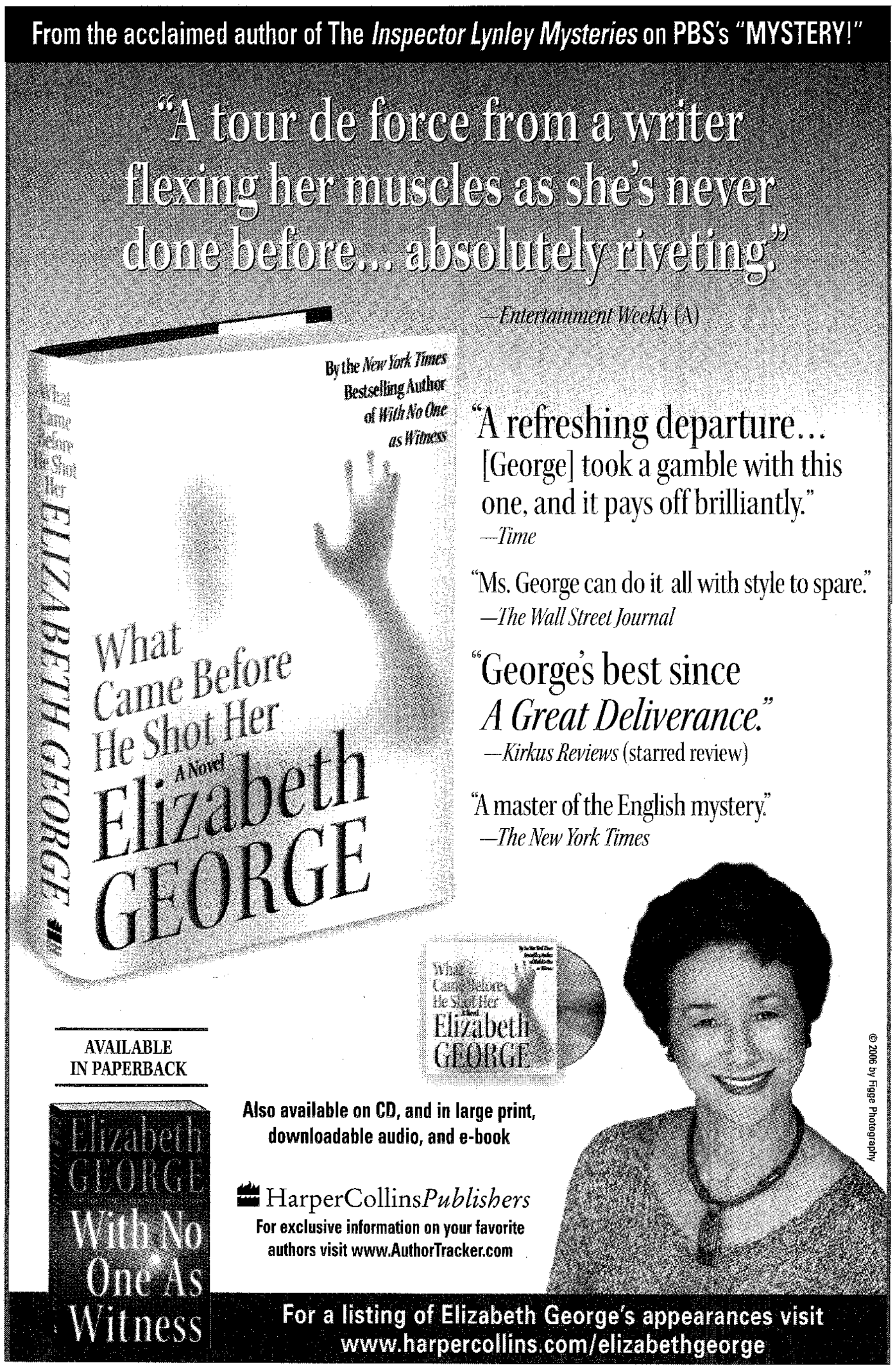
MAD MAN 1: Or "Of course. Where you stay."

MAD MAN 2: "Of course. Stay a while."

MAD MAN 1: "Of course we'll stay!"

STRATEGIST 1: That's great!

MAD MAN 1: Could we get ice? What is Tang, anyway? ♦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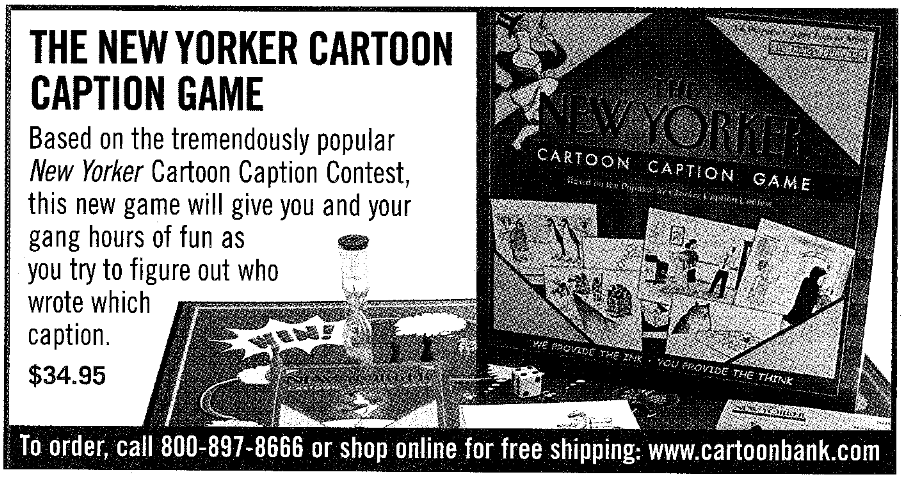
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A CRITIC AT LARGE

A LOST CHILD

The strange case of Minou Drouet.

BY ROBERT GOTTLIEB

If you mention the name Minou Drouet to your French friends in Paris, not many of them under the age of fifty know whom you're talking about. But older people know very well, even if they don't all know the same thing. What do they think they know? She was seven—or was it eight?—years old. She wrote some poems. She didn't write some poems. In any case, they were a hoax, *une supercherie;* it was really her mother who wrote them. She was a victim of her publisher, of the press, of her family. She was talented, but she was a flash in the pan. She had no talent at all—what was it Cocteau said about her, something witty and bitchy? And Roland Barthes, in his "Mythologies"—didn't he weigh in, too?

There's a faint sense of embarrassment when people admit that they remember her, as if they'd just as soon forget that the world made all that fuss about nothing, and they move on to more elevated subjects, like Sartre and Juliette Gréco and the Nouvelle Vague. Because Minou disappeared from the world stage so totally and so long ago, remembering her today reminds people that they're of a certain age. As a saleswoman in the bookstore around the corner from the Comédie Française remarked when I asked her whether any of Minou's work was available, "Well, that question definitely dates us!"

In fact, you can't find a book by Minou in any bookstore in Paris, not even her phenomenally successful "Arbre, Mon Ami," which was published just over fifty years ago—early in 1956—by the aggressive René Julliard, who a year earlier had scored an international triumph with Françoise Sagan's "Bonjour Tristesse." But Sagan had been eighteen; Minou was eight.

In his introduction to "Arbre, Mon Ami," Julliard explained that it was his friend Professor Pasteur Vallery-Radot "of the Académie Française"—the grandson of Louis Pasteur—who first told him about Minou. Vallery-Radot had heard about her from Lucette Descaves, of the Conservatoire de Paris, who was giving the little girl piano lessons, and who soon entrusted Julliard with a batch of letters she'd received from her pupil. "Never had I lit upon a vein of such richness," Julliard wrote. "I at once discovered a freshness and liveliness of feeling, a gift for imagery, and a power of expression that were quite exceptional—in short, a poet." Within days, he had arranged to meet Minou, whose adoptive mother brought her to Paris (from Brittany, where they lived), and soon the Julliards, too, were receiving extraordinary letters from her. Julliard was captivated by the child and impressed by the mother. He decided to publish.

But not in the standard way. Late in September, 1955, five hundred copies of a forty-eight-page sampling of Minou's poems and letters were meted out to "certain critics and amongst my friends." And at once a storm broke—a dispute that, Julliard wrote, "divided the literary and journalistic world into two houses—a sort of minor Dreyfus Affair." As *Time* put it late in November—beneath the heading "Rage of Paris"—"In France, where literature can be a hot front-page issue, the biggest story of the week—and the year's liveliest press brawl—raged around the blonde head of an eight-year-old poetess. Was little Minou Drouet a genius or a fraud?"

Proof that *Time* wasn't exaggerating exists in an obsessively detailed book called "L'Affaire Minou Drouet," which was rushed out by Julliard in early January, just as he was also publishing "Arbre, Mon Ami." The author, André Parinaud, took almost two hundred and fifty crammed pages to chronicle—in agonizing detail—the events of the few months that followed the private distribution of Julliard's pamphlet, recapitulating the vicious attacks and counterattacks in the press, interviewing various participants in the fray, and drawing solemn conclusions.

Just before the pamphlet appeared, two of Minou's poems and two of her letters had been printed in the review *Les Lettres Nouvelles*. A few days later, *L'Express* ran "Who Is Minou Drouet?" and within two weeks the entire world of French literary journalism had joined in. *L'Express* was pro-Minou, who "writes poems that would place her among our fine poets—even if she were an adult." *Combat* was anti: "A prodigy, if you like; but a prodigy not of freshness but of a precocious pedantry." *France Observateur:* "It's impossible to believe that a more expert hand didn't guide these little seven-and-a-half-year-old fingers. Rimbaud, after all, was sixteen." Rimbaud?

Le Figaro, Le Monde, L'Aurore, France-Soir, France-Dimanche, France-Observateur, Franc-Tireur, Tribune de Paris, Paris-Presse, Ici-Paris—each of them took a position. But the most contentious article appeared in the popular weekly *Elle*, which sent a reporter and a photographer to spend time with Minou and her mother, and gave the story four pages and seven photographs. The story didn't actually accuse Mme. Drouet of writing her daughter's poems, but the implication was clear: at best, the mother was a domineering, interfering woman, manipulating her child's talent.

Elle's chief rival, *Paris-Match*, also printed four pages on "L'Enigme Minou Drouet." Its story was less prosecutorial and more of a cliffhanger: "Brilliant child . . . or victim of a hoax." After three days with the Drouets, the magazine could report that it had found Minou to be "a little girl like other little girls, merry and charming, preoccupied with her toys. 'Great!' she shouted. 'No homework today!' " She's photographed at her desk, pen in hand; asleep in her bed, with her Teddy bear; waking up, grinning, "with a new dream" to report—"I stepped out of the pink of my bed, and in the blue of my nightgown went out into the blackness of the garden."

Soon experts, invited and uninvited, were chiming in. A *psychotechnicienne* from Nîmes wrote to *Le Figaro*, referring to Minou as "that poor child" and stating that, in her professional opinion, a single line of Minou's—"My heart has been nothing but a stupid little mayonnaise whisk"—was enough to have her placed under observation. Minou was put to the test—to a variety of tests. Her poems and letters, of course, were handwritten, and graphologists were called in. Those hired by *Elle* were certain that she, had written the poems and the letters—including those composed long before the world had ever heard of Minou Drouet.

At the prompting of both suspicious journalists and staunch defenders, Minou was required to write poems before witnesses, one of which she produced while paying a visit, alone, to the

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Minou in 1955, the year her poems set off "a sort of minor Dreyfus Affair."

the handwriting was essentially Madame's, and the magazine followed up its original, relatively cautious piece with an article forthrightly declaring that it was all "a cruel hoax"—the mother had "not only thought up all of Minou's poems but we have evidence that she also wrote them herself in pseudo-childish handwriting." The experts brought in by Minou's supporters were equally certain that she, and only

Julliards. "Maison Plantée sur le Sable" begins:

House planted on the sand
like a pine tree in the wind
house that echoes with song
and sighs of the sea

It's a cry of longing for a small beach shack that the Drouets rented on the Atlantic coast. She asks if she can write a letter home, and in twenty minutes it's done: "Mama dear, come get me. . . . I've been so unhappy. . . .I slide my arms around your neck, and my little heart is all clothed in sadness." Within days this letter is reprinted in *France-Soir*.

The attacks on the mother and the tormenting of the child never let up. In a letter to Mme. Julliard, Minou wrote, "Our street is vomiting journalists non-stop. It feels like the whole world is after me. . . .I wish I were dead. They keep on and on at me with their questions. I think the only words I can utter are fear, pain, death." As Roland Barthes wrote—and, years later, Minou quoted him—"One can prove imposture; never authenticity."

"Arbre, Mon Ami" was published in January, 1956, and the publicity had been so unrelenting that within a few months the little book had sold forty-five thousand copies. (Later, Minou said, "I believe that René Julliard himself was at the bottom of this campaign.") The celebrated actress Madeleine Renaud recorded a group of the poems and letters. A jazz band, Michel Attenoux et Son Orchestre, released the "Minou Drouet Stomp"—you can find it in a recently issued CD collection, "Jazz in Paris."

A month after publication, Minou was put to the severest test of all. The February 13th issue of *Life* tells the story: To resolve the controversy, Minou agreed to take a test for membership in the Society of Authors, Composers, and Music Publishers. She was left alone in the director's office (from which "the telephone had been removed to prevent all communication with the outside world") and given a choice of two topics to write on: "I'm Eight Years Old" or "Paris Sky." "My eight years were already too sad," she said. "I chose Paris Sky." Within twenty-five minutes she had written a few dozen lines, and the judges, as *Life* put it, "admiringly awarded her membership. 'I've won,' yelped Minou." *Life's* translation, in part:

Paris sky
secret weight,
flesh which in hiccoughs
spits into our faces
through the open jaws of rows of houses,
a stream of blood
between its luminous teeth
Paris sky
cocktail of night and of fear
which one savors with little licks of the tongue
with little catches of the heart
from the tip of a neon straw

The heading: "Proof of a Prodigy." The photograph: tiny Minou—a huge bow on top of her head—with two beaming elderly gentlemen standing behind her. The caption: "Test finished, Minou hands poem to Society's judges. She sat on a pillow, kept pet dog on desk."

Minou Drouet's existence was turbulent well before she became a cause célèbre—in fact, from the very beginning. When she was a year and a half old, she was adopted by Claude Drouet, an educated woman who earned her living by coaching children at home. The story was that her parents had drowned in a fishing-boat accident, but actually she was illegitimate, and her birth mother had signed away all rights to her. This fact was printed in *Elle* as proof that "The Mother" was a liar, but it's obvious that Mme. Drouet was acting to protect Minou's reputation, not her own: bastardy would have been a serious black mark against a child in the moral climate of a small town in Brittany in the late nineteen-forties. The editors of *Elle* must surely have known that what they printed would come to the attention of this very sensitive child.

Minou was almost blind at birth, and for three years or so lived in a semi-autistic state, unable to speak and cut off from communicating with people other than her mother and her beloved grandmother. Years later, she wrote, "Locked inside myself, I led the life of some kind of vegetable. . . . The doctors warned Mama, 'The condition of this child is desperate. We can't imagine her being cured.' " Other children were unkind to her, and her emotions were directed almost entirely to nature: to animals, birds, and especially the big tree in the garden—"*Arbre, mon ami*."

Tree
drawn by a clumsy child
a child too poor to buy colored pencils
who scrawled you with the brown left over
from drawing maps at school.
Tree I come to you.
Console me
for being only me.

Then, when she was three, Minou heard Bach organ music on the radio, and it awakened her to the world. Music became her link to humanity, and in those early years it was music rather than

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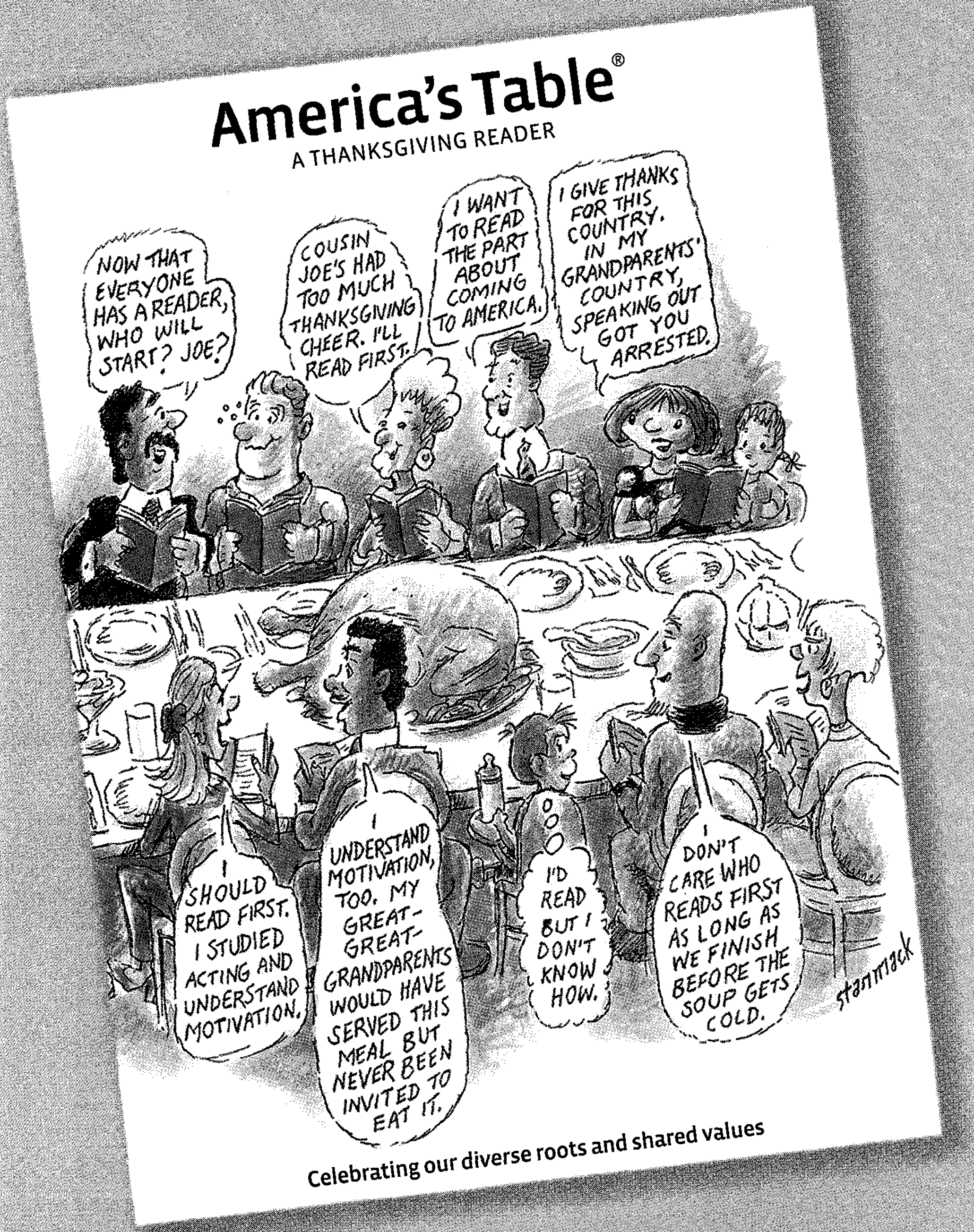

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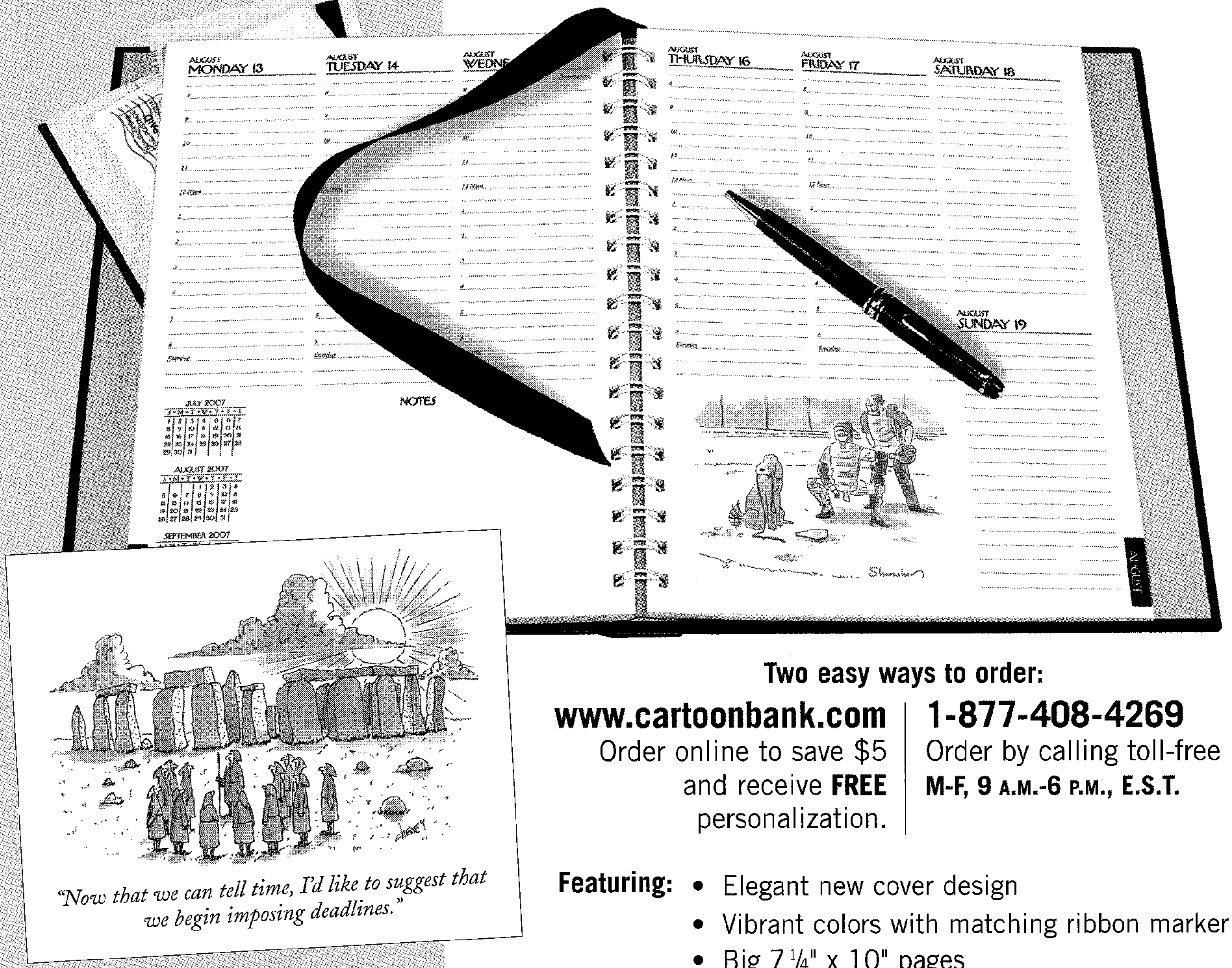
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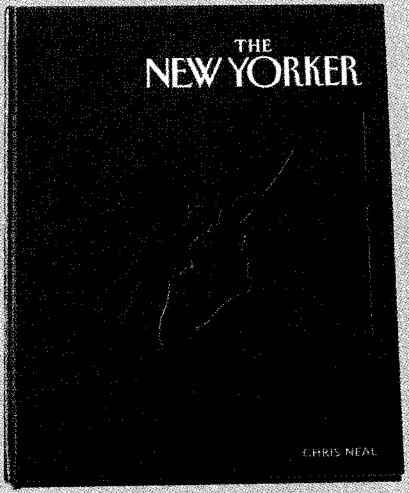
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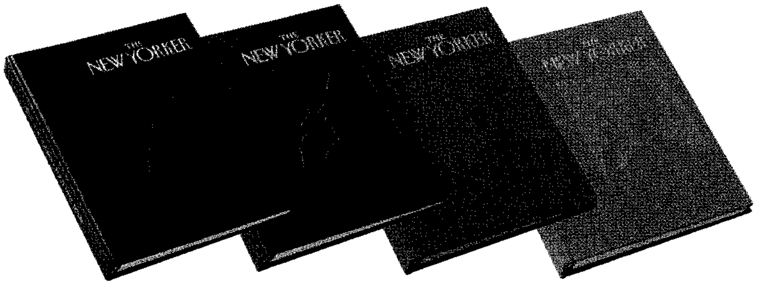
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also available at THE NEW YORKER STORE www.thenewyorkerstore.com writing that obsessed her. Her passion led to piano lessons from a local teacher, and her abilities led her eventually to Mme. Descaves, in Paris; if the child wasn't a miniature Mozart (any more than she was a miniature Rimbaud), she was clearly gifted.

Mme. Drouet encouraged her gifts—some would say exploited them. However devoted she was to her child, to strangers she could appear severe, controlling, overprotective. She would jump to answer questions put to Minou, declaim her poetry, boast about her talent. She was, clearly, a classic stage mother—using her child both to live out her own ambitions and to carry her and Minou onto a larger stage than was available to them in La Guerche-de-Bretagne. Minou read the situation with a cool precision: "My successes opened the door for her to opportunities that would otherwise have remained closed."

The child was firmly disciplined—kept hard at work and punished for infractions of the rules. (Minou in a letter to the famous pianist Yves Nat: "Little girls' bottoms are really a wonderful gift from heaven for calming the nerves of mothers. . . . It's because of you that I had my bottom spanked, because I didn't write Mr. in the address and didn't put a capital letter.")

When Minou was seven, her mother took her to a well-known ophthalmologist in Lyons, who operated successfully on the little girl's eyes, making possible the highly charged years that lay ahead. Soon after the publication of her book, Minou's life began its transformation from that of a controversial child poet to that of a full-fledged celebrity. She mixes with cabinet ministers at the Julliards'; she collaborates with famous singer-songwriters like Gilbert Bécaud; she's photographed with Maurice Chevalier (he's kissing her hand) and at the première of Jacques-Yves Cousteau's "The World of Silence." (She's ten, and that big bow is still in her hair.) She stars in a movie. She launches and designs lines of children's fashions. She demonstrates her guitar playing for Andrés Segovia. Pablo Casals teaches her his "Song of the Birds." In Rome, she encounters Vittorio De Sica, and "quickly we were inseparable—we spent the entire day together."

She even wins Cocteau over. His famous comment—the one thing everyone remembers about Minou—is quoted in many versions. In her memoirs she recalls it this way: "All nine-year-olds have genius—except Minou Drouet." But one day at a book-signing he came up to her and hugged her. "He was so charming that you couldn't hold anything against him."

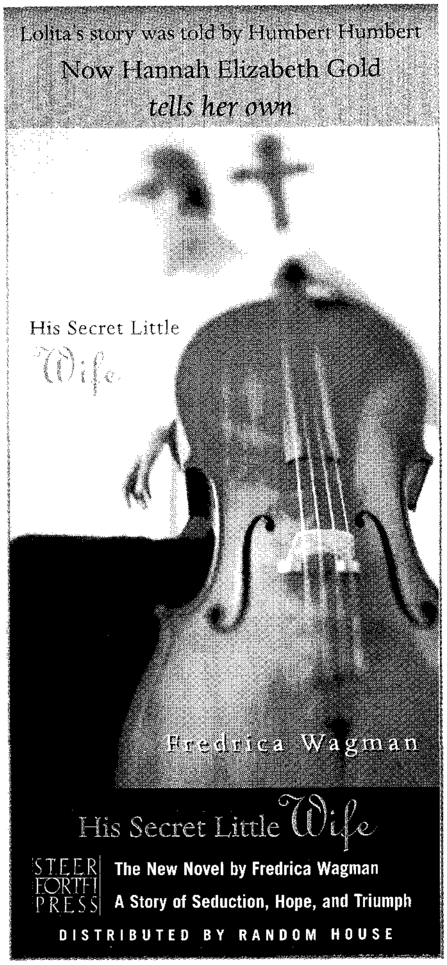
Most impressive of all, at the age of ten she's granted a private audience with Pope Pius XII. When she and her mother arrive at the Vatican, her mother warns her to behave herself, but "I forgot all these instructions when a monsignor, dressed in a long violet soutane, came to meet us in an outer chamber. He leaned toward me in a friendly way":

> "Minou Drouet, I very much like your poems."
>
> I answered like a shot: "And I very much like your robe. It's really well cut!"
>
> Maman threw me a look. A nun, standing by, sketched a smile.
>
> We followed the monsignor. In the innermost chamber a priest pointed to a massive gold throne and said, "His Holiness is going to sit here to receive you."
>
> I looked at the throne. I raised my eyes. I pointed to a Jesus on the Cross that was hanging on the wall.
>
> "His Holiness is going to sit on this throne? And what's the One up there going to say about that—He's only got two pieces of wood!"
>
> A burst of laughter from behind me. Pope Pius XII had just come in. "I don't think anyone's said anything like that in the entire history of the Vatican," he remarked.

After Minou and the Pope take each other's measure and discuss where she might receive her First Communion, he says to her, "Come and visit me again if God so wishes it." She writes, "Impulsively, I sprang toward him and flung my arms around his neck."

The Pope: "I'm going to pray that you always remain just as you are."

By this time, Minou was in rigorous training, every minute accounted for. She practiced the piano for hours every day; studied guitar and gymnastics; spent six years learning ballet. Soon she was touring France, appearing with other celebrities—pop singers and comedians—in night clubs, theatres, arenas. Her act involved reading her poems aloud, singing to her own guitar accompaniment, playing "Claire de Lune," Handel's Passacaglia, Albinoni's Adagio on the piano. (There's a demented pho-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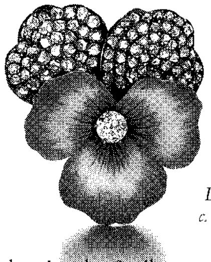
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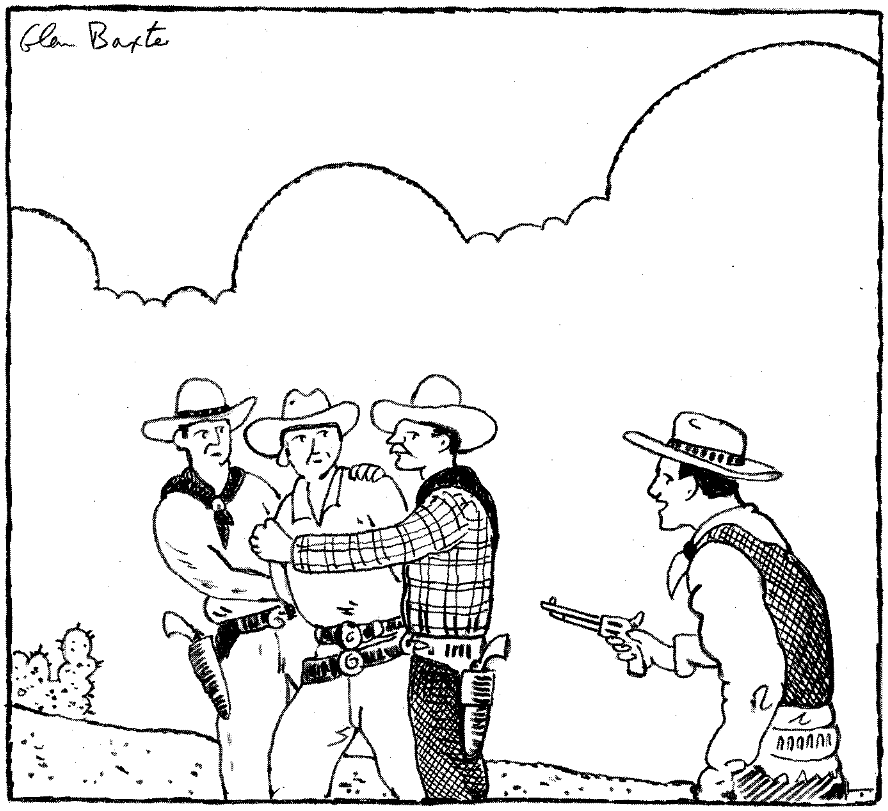

"ONE MORE IAMBIC PENTAMETER AND YOU'RE HISTORY!" WHISPERED THE DEPUTY LIBRARIAN.

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tograph of her standing on a piano, arching backward until her fingers are on the keyboard. She's playing upside down!) In June, 1957—she's about ten—she's at the Gaumont Palace in Paris, the largest theatre in Europe (six thousand seats), performing between screenings of Gary Cooper's "Friendly Persuasion." In Brussels, she's on with Jacques Brel and Charles Aznavour. At La Scala, she's a guest of honor at a gala for Mario del Monaco. She's thirteen when a rose is named after her.

Her mother made all the decisions, refusing to bring in a professional manager and appearing to say yes to anything and everything...until, eventually, Minou said no. Or life said it for her. Her grandmother fell fatally ill, and Minou nursed her, and then, impulsively, decided to study nursing: "From one day to the next in 1966 I decided to enter the universe of the ill." She worked in a hospital for two years, caring for women giving birth, old people, and desperately ill children. Then it was back to Paris and the bohemian life of the Left Bank, singing and playing her guitar in cafés and clubs, running around on her motorbike in a leather jacket, and marrying a standup comedian and writer who worked with the famous humorist Thierry Le Luron. (When you mention this to the French they're stunned—and impressed. Although Thierry has been dead for twenty years, his TV clips and records are still wildly popular, part of the cultural climate. It's as if we suddenly discovered that Shirley Temple had been close to Lenny Bruce.)

In her early twenties, Minou published some fables, a novel for children, and a novel for adults, but the irresistible impulse to write had left her when she was fourteen: "When a bird no longer feels the desire to sing, it stays silent." Her mother contracted Parkinson's and needed her, her marriage petered out, and in her early thirties she retreated to La Guerche-de-Bretagne, to the house where she grew up. There she cut herself off completely from her public past, making no appearances and refusing all interviews, until 1993, when, having remarried—her husband, Jean-Paul Le Canu, is a local garageman—she published a reticent and skimpy memoir, "Ma Vérité" ("My Truth"). But the public was indifferent. Her celebrity, like her talent, had disappeared.

In her book, Minou acknowledged that part of her had found it hard to give up the fame, the applause, the perks: "You amputate part of yourself." But she went on to say, "If I had the kind of child I myself was, I would try to protect her from all the temptations and assaults of the world.... Beyond the public recognition there's everything that can't be replaced—play, friends, family, a kind of freedom. Everything I had to live without."

Last year, I called Minou Drouet from Paris, explaining my interest in her and her work, and proposing that we meet. Her voice was soft, but her attitude was firm: it was years, she said, since she'd spoken publicly about her early life, and she was determined to keep it that way; under no circumstances would she see me. Fair enough: given her history, if anyone deserved privacy it was Minou Drouet. Nevertheless, I wanted to see at first hand the world she had come from and then retreated to.

La Guerche-de-Bretagne, a half hour's drive from the substantial city of Rennes, is a small market town, almost characterless. It isn't a tourist destination; there's nothing historic or oldetimey about it. It's the equivalent of a small upstate New York town, only with a central square rather than a main street; you don't go through it, you go into it. On the Place Charles de Gaulle, there's a standard church, a jewelry store, a travel agent, one or two real-estate agencies, and a restaurant with modest pretensions that at lunch was packed with people, most of them eating slabs of meat seared on an open fire. La Guerche looks as if nothing had changed there since the end of the war, just before Minou was born.

When I began asking people about her, it became clear that she was living less in privacy than in anonymity. No one in the restaurant, the travel agency, the jewelry store was aware that a once

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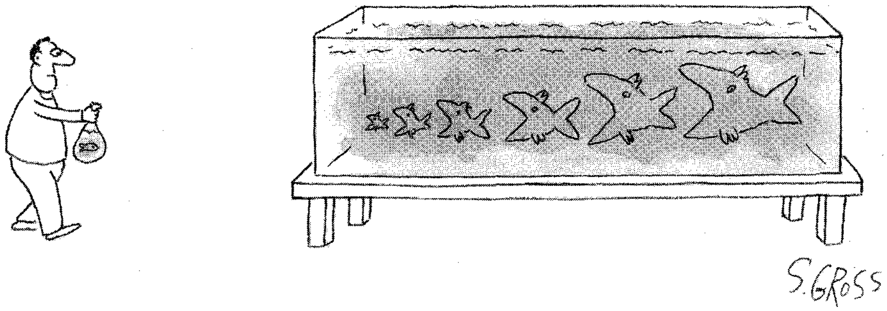
celebrated figure named Minou Drouet had grown up in their town or lives in it today. In the one place that sells books—a large stationery store carrying magazines, computer games, maps, guidebooks, cookbooks, and a few "real" books, like "The Da Vinci Code"—the salespeople had never heard of her.

The pleasant residential street she lives on is a ten-minute walk from the center of town. The street curves, and there at the end of a row of attached brick houses is the family house that now belongs to Minou. It's set back from the others and considerably larger; the Drouets were people of means. To the right and stretching out behind it is a large garden, Minou's beloved garden, and in the middle of it is a very big cedar of Lebanon—her friend the tree. There's no one on the street as I walk down it, trying to be inconspicuous; no one peering through the immaculate lace curtains that hang in every front window. Beyond Minou's house, the street dwindles into fields. As I pass, I'm startled to see a woman emerge from the back door and step into the garden, then go back inside. She's handsome—a woman in her fifties, dressed in good country clothes, her blond hair piled up on her head. She doesn't see me, and I'm both relieved that I haven't intruded on her privacy and moved at this fortuitous sighting.

As I head back, a man who's doing something under the hood of his car looks up at me sharply. How many strangers can have strolled down this quiet suburban street, leading nowhere, since the days when it was "vomiting journalists"? It turns out that this man is aware that Mme. Le Canu was once some kind of writer, although he's never read anything she wrote. "She walks past here almost every day, carrying her basket to the market," he tells me. "She's very nice, good-looking, quite friendly." And he adds, "Her husband is much younger than she is." He seems to feel that this is a touch a journalist would appreciate; it certainly interests him more than the idea that his nice neighbor was once a famous child poet. Which only confirms my sense that although Minou Drouet may have grown up in La Guerche, she's not to be found there today. The woman living on this street, whom I've just had a glimpse of, is Mme. Jean-Paul Le Canu.

Weeks later, I talk to the writer Jean-Max Tixier, who collaborated with Minou on "Ma Vérité," in the early nineties. When he first saw the manuscript, he says, it was "very thin"; "only facts"; "close to unpublishable." You can see why: this is a book pulling in two directions at once. You feel a strong internal pressure in Minou to disgorge her "truth," but there's an equally powerful impulse toward discretion, omission, suppression. It doesn't require much psychological acumen to figure out that what she needed to express and what she needed to suppress are the same thing: her anger at what had been done to her. "No one protected me. Adults rode on my back to exploit me. . . . I was caught up in the gears."

And who was the person who *should* have protected her? Her mother—the one who exposed her to the world, first as a beleaguered victim, then as a performing seal. Yet it's also her mother who rescued this semi-autistic, semi-blind orphan and gave her a life. Minou is rigorously fair, fully aware of her debt to the woman who adopted and succored her. But her account has very little warmth, and it leaves out a good deal—for instance, that her birth mother, who she discovered lived only a few kilometres away, had refused to meet her. One of the oddities of "Ma Vérité" is that the text switches back and forth between Minou's cautious memories and Tixier's commentary on them. It's as if he were



reviewing the very book he's helping to write: "She sidesteps, she runs away, she doesn't remember, she's lost the documents that would clarify."

M. Tixier and his wife, Monique (who, luckily for me, speaks excellent English), spent time in La Guerche while he worked with Minou, and he tells me that, except for one or two paintings of her as a child, there's no sign in her house of her earlier existence—no copies of her books, no scrapbooks. "She's completely confined to her current world," he says. "She didn't keep anything of the past." Although the Tixiers say they liked her, they found her strangely distant and affectless—much the way she came across on the telephone. "When we had dinner together, she was like a little girl, not like a grown woman," Monique Tixier remarked. "She sat in her place, very proper, well behaved, and, to be frank, uninteresting. It was strange—as if she were still carrying that little girl around inside herself." Some people deal with their pain by exploring and absorbing it; that, clearly, had proved impossible for Minou Drouet. Her way was to lop it off and bury it—by burying herself in La Guerche. Which leaves only her work to reveal her to us.

Her fiction offers few clues. The tales for children are almost exclusively about sensitive, special children and their beloved animals—loving squirrels, heroic dogs, loyal falcons. Her only novel for adults, called "Donatella" in its English translation, is a strongly felt, if peculiar, book that arbitrarily shifts its center of attention from a lonely boy who suddenly goes blind to a young, attractive nurse-in-training who does things like crouch all night by the bedside of an Arab boy who's dying of cancer, earning the enmity of the coarser nurses but winning the heart of a handsome young doctor. When these modest books were published, they received some favorable attention, but decades of silence followed—until "Ma Vérité," which she could hardly bring herself to write and which she refused to promote. It passed unnoticed.

That leaves the poems and the letters. The poems are what grabbed attention back in the fifties, and they're still remarkable for their combination of naïveté and richness of imagination. A passage like the following is not the typical effusion of a seven- or eight-year-old:

> I was the clock face
> whose hands bite the fleeting
> now,
> then silently
> move on to what is
> already no more,
> and from what is already no more
> life is born in me.

A child who had been mute and isolated, both burdened and blessed with overwhelming feelings that she couldn't express, is bursting out, giving us the unmediated outpourings of an over-full heart. Is it great poetry? No. But it's no *supercherie;* it's real.

And in a way Minou is even more remarkable in her letters. Whether they're addressed to Lucette Descaves ("I cover your eyes with kisses") or to the Julliards ("I love you, my Arabesque, my Sonata, you are the two who are indispensable to me"), the letters spill over with everything she's doing, thinking, feeling. Perhaps the most extraordinary are those addressed to her friend Philippe, who's fifteen and has sworn to marry her when she grows up, and with whom she's made a pact: they will always think of each other at exactly eight in the evening. This is from the last letter that appears in "Arbre, Mon Ami": "My darling, it's eight o'clock, our eight o'clock. You remember the night when you said to me, in our cedar, 'I love you so madly that if you want I'll go and find you the moon.' . . . Philippe, at the eighth stroke of eight o'clock I plunged the sliver of crystal you sent me into the sea, at the place where the moon trembles, and I held it out to you, the moon, that living petal in its crystal cage. And I threw back my head and held out my hair to you, my hair in which you so loved to bury your face, it was the color of sad water and tasted of salt, and its tendrils were saying to you: You're loved."

This is Minou Drouet before she's eight—a primitive, an ecstatic, an original. A few years later, she's become a phenomenon, a scandal, a byword. "I was a lost child," she says. "I was only a pathetic little animal," she says. "What crime did I commit to be persecuted this way?" she asks. There is no answer. That she survived at all is a testament to her strength. That she lost Minou on her way to becoming Mme. Le Canu is the price she was willing to pay. ♦

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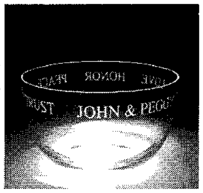

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LIFE AND LETTERS

NOAH'S MARK

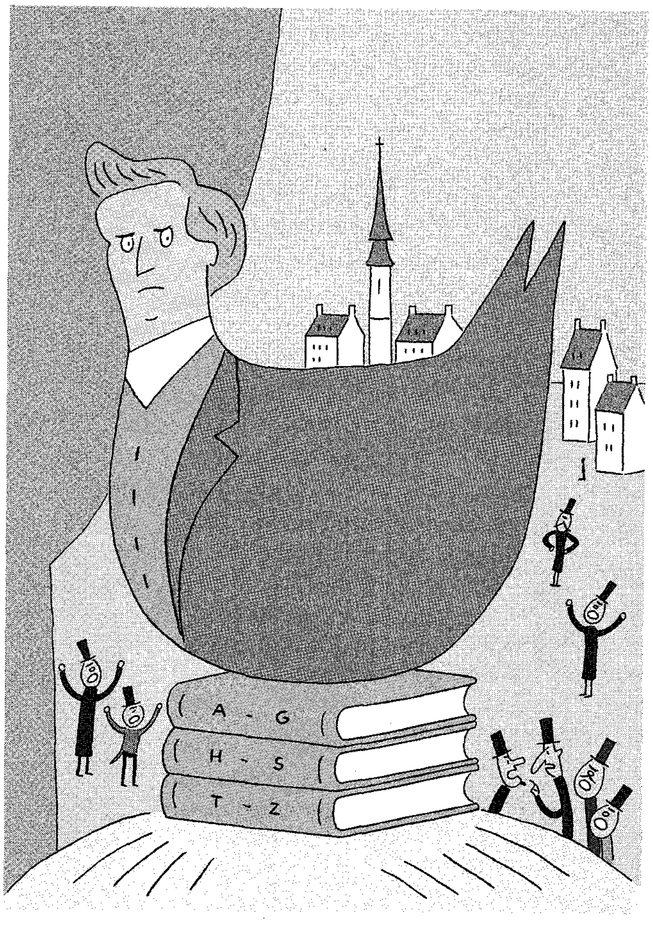
Webster and the original dictionary wars.

BY JILL LEPORE

On June 4, 1800, Noah Webster, a sometime schoolteacher, failed lawyer, and staggeringly successful spelling-book author, placed an ad in the back pages of a Connecticut newspaper, just above notices of a sailor's death, a shoe sale, and a farmer's reward for a stray cow. The sailor had drowned; the cheap shoes were "Ladies' Morocco"; the red milch cow had "a white face and large teats." And Webster, who was forty-two, had plans to compile a "Dictionary of the American Language."

"It is found that a work of this kind is absolutely necessary," Webster announced, hoping to drum up advance orders, "on account of considerable differences between the American and English language." The American people had declared independence and constituted their own government. Now they needed their own dictionary, a place to put, and look up, all the new words they had coined—Americanisms like "lengthy," a good word to describe both the dictionary and the amount of time it would take Webster to finish it. Seventy thousand entries and a quarter century later, in 1825, he wrote his last definition, much to the relief of his wife and seven children and, toward the end, the grandchildren who stomped up and down the stairs while he toiled away, A to Z, in a study whose walls had been packed with sand to keep out the noise of even their whispers. (Although, for those brave enough to open his study door, Webster stocked a desk drawer with raisins and peppermints.)

Whether it was worth it is hard to say. But Webster's dictionary rewarded him with the kind of immortality reserved for only a handful of writers: embossed in gold on faux-leather book spines, his name shimmers from the shelves of every American library; dog-eared paperback copies of Webster's have been lost and found under dormitory mattresses from Amherst to Berkeley; and chances are that Webster lives on, unseen, on your hard drive, waiting for your need to know the meaning of "jobbernowl."



Webster's allies and foes alike mocked his plans for a dictionary.

PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

But Webster's fame was always strange, even before he died, in New Haven in 1843, at the age of eighty-four. Outside his family, nearly everyone who knew him found him insufferable, and strangers who thought they admired him usually didn't: they'd mistaken him for another Webster, the fiery orator and Massachusetts senator. (If he had published an autobiography, it would have been called "I Am Not Daniel!") This year marks the bicentennial of Webster's first dictionary, the granddaddy of them all. In 1806, Webster published a small volume of brisk definitions ("Dic'tionary, n. a book of words explained in alphabetical order"), not much bigger than your average "Pocket Webster's." Its anniversary has come and nearly gone, unobserved except at a handful of bookstore chats and spelling bees hosted by the Merriam-Webster publishing company. Webster, a pessimist who gave the English language the word "demoralize," might have predicted as much.

Maybe it's just as well that no one remembers that first Webster's: its début was a debacle, a casualty of the checkered politics of the new nation. It failed because of who Webster was, a conservative with liberal ideas, living in a recklessly partisan age. Only after what Webster stood for no longer mattered, only after Americans had begun to forget who he was, did his dictionaries succeed. Web'ster, n. a dictionary. But Webster? Webster *who*?

In June of 1800, Noah Webster's proposal for an American dictionary made national news. No news might have been better. Within a week, a Philadelphia newspaper editor called Webster's idea preposterous (it is "perfectly absurd to talk of the *American* language") and his motives mercenary ("the plain truth is . . . that he means to *make money*"). Two American dictionaries, published just months before, had been badly drubbed, too. The first promised "a number of words in vogue not found in any dictionary." One reviewer, dismissing "sans culotte," "hauter," and "composuist" as, respectively, French, not even a word, and just plain silly, deemed the dictionary "at best, useless." No better were notices of the Massachusetts minister Caleb Alexander's "Columbian Dictionary," containing "*Many* NEW WORDS, *peculiar to the United States.*" "A disgusting collection" of idiotic words coined by "presumptuous ignorance," one critic wrote, referring to Americanisms like "wigwam," "rateability," "caucus," and "lengthy" (lengthy? what's next, "strengthy"?). "The Columbian Dictionary," as he saw it, was nothing more than "a record of our imbecility."

You might think it would be hard to top that kind of clobbering, at least without thumbing through a thesaurus for synonyms for "worthless" and "tripe," but Webster's critics were pretty resourceful. Joseph Dennie, the editor of the *Gazette of the United States*, began his reply to Webster's announcement with this snub: "If, as Mr. Webster asserts, it is true that many new words have already crept into the language of the United States, he would be much better employed in rooting out those anxious weeds, than in mingling them with the flowers." He then printed a pile of (fake) letters from readers, addressed to Webster:

> Sur,
> I find you are after meaking a nue Merrykin Dikshunary; your rite, Sur; for after lookin all over the anglish Books, you wont find a bit of SHILLALY big enuf to beat a dog wid.
> PAT O'DOGERTY
>
> As I find der ish no DONDER and BLIXSUM in de English Dikshonere I hope you put both in yours. . .
> HANS BUBBLEBLOWER
>
> Massa Webser plese put sum HOMMANY and sum good POSSUM FAT and sum two tree good BANJOE in your new what-you-call-um Book for your fello Cytzen.
> CUFFEE

This kind of ranting—about the debasing influence of immigrants on American English—is so familiar, and even hackneyed, that it's easy to guess that writers like Dennie drank from the same political well as pundits who now rally against, say, Spanglish. Or to imagine that early American literati who objected to the clunky "rateability" and the ill-gotten "lengthy" were just the kind of language purists who today scorn every "thru" and mistaken "hopefully" as just so many weeds in the garden of good English. It would make sense if Webster's critics had been political and cultural conservatives. But they weren't, or, at least, they weren't only that. Webster's Nue Merrykin Dikshunary, conceived in the era in which modern political parties were born, had the very bad bipartisan luck of offending nearly everybody.

The snootiest opposition, it's true, came from members of Webster's own Federalist Party: well-heeled men who loved England, hated France, favored a strong central government, and despised all that was common. Webster himself believed that a representative government "can be rendered durable in no other way than by excluding from elections men who have so little property, education, or principle, that they are liable to yield their own opinions to the guidance of unprincipled leaders." He was such a snob that even Federalists called him "the Monarch."

But when it came to his dictionary Webster was a republican. "The man who undertakes to censure others for the use of certain words and to decide what is or is not correct in language seems to arrogate to himself a dictatorial authority, the legitimacy of which will always be denied," Webster insisted. He believed, radically for his time, that the mass of common people, not a select few, form language and establish its rules. Their judgment, not the judgment of better-educated men, holds sway: "The lexicographer's business is solely to collect, arrange and define the words that usage presents to his hands. He has no right to proscribe words; he is to present them as they are."

Federalists couldn't stomach this sort of pandering to the common man. "To coin new words, or to use them in a new sense, is, incontrovertibly, one of the unalienable rights of freemen," one critic lampooned, "and whoever disputes this right, is the friend of civil tyranny, and an enemy to liberty and equality." Their logic about Webster's proposed dictionary went something like this: Because any words new to the United States are either stupid or foreign, there is no such thing as the "American language"; there's just bad English. "In what can a Columbian dictionary differ from an English one, but in barbarisms?" one Federalist newspa-

WHAT WE CALL CONFIDENCE IN OURSELVES WE CALL CONCEIT IN OTHERS.

– Tommy Dewar
(1864-1930)

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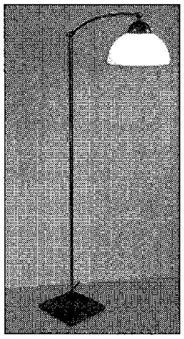

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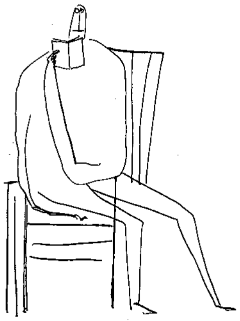
per editor asked, warning Webster, "If he will persist, in spite of common sense, to furnish us with a dictionary, which we do not want, in return for his generosity, I will furnish him with a title for it. Let, then, the projected volume of *foul* and *unclean* things, bear his own christian name, and be called NOAH'S ARK."

In this, Federalists agreed with English writers who were miffed at Webster's claim that his proposed "Dictionary of the American Language" would surpass the work its title echoed: Samuel Johnson's much celebrated 1755 "Dictionary of the English Language." On hearing of Webster's plan, an Englishman named Jonathan Boucher set about compiling his own American dictionary—or, really, an anti-American anti-dictionary, a list of words so useless and imbecilic that he could hardly believe anyone, even uncouth Americans, had ever used them. Americans, he scoffed, were "addicted to innovation," no less in language than in everything else: "The United States of America, too proud, as it would seem, to acknowledge themselves indebted to this country, for their existence, their power, or their language, denying and revolting against the two first," are now making haste "to rid themselves of the last."



Boucher had a point. Webster, for one, did think the United States should have its own language. "Language, as well as government, should be national," he wrote in 1789, in his "Dissertations on the English Language." "America should have her *own*, distinct from all the world." In the fullness of time, and with a little nudging here and there, the American language would one day be as different from English as Danish is from German. As a young man, Webster had tried to help things along; in 1783, when he was twenty-five, he published an American spelling book, in the hope that no American schoolchild would ever again be so cowed by John Bull as to put a "u" in "honor." In 1789, he toyed with a more radical proposal, urging Americans to spell words the way they sounded, under which reform reading and writing would be simpler and, even more important, American writers would pop out on the page, immediately distinguishable from British authors: "There iz no alternativ."

But Webster shared Boucher's aversion to innovation. Attacking innovation, on principle, as heedless and rash and, worse, vaguely French, was not just an English fashion; the American Federalists did it, too, especially during the bloodiest years of the French Revolution—a revolution that had gone too far, had experimented and innovated too much, had not known when to stop. Federalists believed, urgently, that Americans had to either stifle their impulse to innovate or risk their own Reign of Terror. Now that an orderly government had been established, the time had come for Americans to stop making the world anew, to leave off rethinking the social order, to forswear novelty. Wasn't the Bill of Rights enough? Webster agreed. To the charge of attempting "to innovate, by changing the orthography of words," he pleaded not guilty, explaining that he was only returning words to the original spelling: "I do *not* innovate, but *reject innovation.*"

This hardly stopped his Federalist critics from using the "i" word. In 1800, Joseph Dennie, signing himself "An Enemy to Innovation," wrote of Webster's proposed dictionary, "These innovations in literature are precisely what Jacobinism is in Politics." Dennie thought that Republicanism and the idea of an "American language" had this in common: "They are both owing to the stupid vanity of the present day, which induces mankind to despise the well-tried principles of their Ancestors." It was just this kind of thing that led to anarchy. "If we once sanction the impertinence of individuals, who think themselves authorized to coin new words on every occasion," Dennie warned, "our language will soon become a confused jargon, which will require a new Dictionary every year."

It's not surprising that Federalists wanted nothing to do with Webster's dictionary. Harder to explain is why his proposal was attacked by Republicans, the nation's champions of innovation. Republicans believed that the American Revolution had not gone far enough, and blamed the Federalists for halting it. They embraced novelty, pointing to corrupt and decayed England as a place where, as Thomas Jefferson put it, "the dread of innovation" had "palsied the spirit of improvement." They supported the French Revolution, even as they decried the violence of Robespierre. And they admired the way France's revolution had put life back into the French language, spawning hundreds of new words—*les matérialistes, les démagogues, Monsieur Veto, les sans culottes.* As Jefferson exulted, "What a language has the French become since the date of their revolution, by the free introduction of new words!"

When Webster, mocking Federalist criticism of his dictionary, wrote, "New words! New ideas! What, Americans have *new* ideas! Why the man is mad!," Republicans might have been sympathetic. But they really did think Webster was mad. A "mortal and incurable lunatic," one Republican called him. They didn't object to his dictionary, they objected to him. Harry Warfel, in a 1936 biography of Webster—still the best—traced how, in the seventeen-nineties, Webster had been a prolific and partisan political pamphleteer. He had cursed the French, derided Republicans, and supported every curb of liberty imposed by the Washington and Adams Administrations, including the notorious 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts, restricting foreign immigration and banning political opposition, under which Republican newspaper editors were jailed for calling John Adams's judgment into question. To Republicans, the monarchical Webster was nothing more than a "pusillanimous, half-begotten, self-dubbed patriot," a "dunghill cock of faction." His dictionary couldn't possibly be any good.

What saved Webster's dictionary from this bipartisan political quicksand was the time it took him to finish it. He guessed that it might take five years, or eight—ten at the outside. But by 1818 he had only reached the letter "B." He was delayed by distractions: his work as a member of the Connecticut legislature; the need to revise his "American Spelling Book"; the births of his first son, William, in 1801, and of his fifth daughter, Eliza, two years later. (On paper, Webster is almost entirely without charm—not for nothing was he known as the "critick and coxcomb general of the United States"—but his private life was marked by affectionate devotion to his wife, Rebecca Greenleaf, and their children, something that comes across best in his letters, housed in ten archival boxes at the New York Public Library: closing one letter abruptly, he scrawled, "Becca has a crying child in her arms, and I must relieve her.") If he was ever going to finish his magnum opus, he'd need to find a better way to feed his family while he dedicated himself to his dictionary.

In 1805, strapped for cash, Webster decided to publish a little dictionary, aimed at merchants, students, and travellers—a "Compendious Dictionary," containing no etymologies or quotations and only pithy definitions. ("Compend'ious, a. short, brief, concise, summary.") He hoped it would raise money and, at the same time, turn the tide of public opinion. But when it was published, in 1806, it did neither, not least because it showcased Webster's innovative spelling of words like "groop," "wimmen," and "tung," about which even his supporters had their doubts. John Quincy Adams, who admired Webster's doggedness, chided him for his "liberality of admission" in allowing so many new words. But his severest critics marshalled the evidence of his hypocrisy. In a long, not to say lengthy, review, the Boston Federalist James Savage wrote, "In the midst of a people grave, stable and just, the foes to jacobins and disorder, no individual presents a bolder front against the demon of innovation than Mr. Webster. No contemptible epithet is in his estimation too severe for the common people." But in his dictionaries, Savage complained, Webster has the gall to declare "that the common people alone are the lawful sovereigns over the realms of language; and that scholars and learned men ought to bend to their supremacy."

Webster battled back. "I am accused of introducing into my Dictionary *Americanisms and vulgarisms*," he wrote. But what is a lexicographer to do when the people of Connecticut use "fourfold" as a verb? "Is this my fault?" he asked. Savage had attacked his inclusion in the "Compendious Dictionary" of the lowly word "crock" ("n. an earthen pot, pan, black of a pot"), on the ground that no refined writer would ever use it. Webster demanded, "Shall its use among common people exclude it from Dictionaries? Elegant writers seldom have occasion for terms that are peculiar to the humble occupations of life. Dryden and Addison might have written ten times the number of volumes which they actually wrote, and never have had occasion to mention the *hub* or *tire* of

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a wheel. And what then? Are these, for that reason, to be denounced as illegitimate words or not English?" He fought in vain. The first "Webster's" was a flop.

Amid all this, Webster's domestic life darkened: in 1806, his second son, Henry Bradford, died within weeks of his birth. Six months later, Webster's ailing father wrote to beg for money. Frantic, Webster came up with another scheme. In 1807, he published a circular letter addressed "To the Friends of Literature in the United States," seeking advance subscriptions for the big dictionary at ten dollars each. A friend warned him, "My experience of the world has satisfied me that it is in vain to reason with the greatest part of mankind, if they have to pay Ten Dollars, in consequence of being convinced." Even after Webster had the circular printed and posted on the doors of libraries from Salem to Philadelphia, only seventeen men subscribed. Two never paid, and two more demanded their money back.

"If I had not a family," Webster wrote, "I would quit a country where men who propose improvements on certain books are sure to be abused." His work was Herculean, he said, but he was being persecuted like Galileo.

Worse was still to come. In April, 1808, Rebecca Webster, aged forty-one, gave birth to her last child, a girl named Louisa, whose life would be blighted by severe mental and physical infirmities. That month, in his study, Webster found Jesus: "A sudden impulse upon my mind arrested me, and subdued my will. I instantly fell on my knees and confessed my sins to God, implored his pardon, and made my vows to him that from that time I would live in entire obedience to his commands."

Even before he was born again, Webster had decided to study etymology. But now he brought the zeal of a convert to his plan to offer proof that the Old Testament contained the literal truth: that all languages derive from a single, original pre-Babel language, the language of Eden. He almost entirely stopped working on definitions, a detour he could ill afford. "I shall sell my house to get bread for my children," Webster wrote in 1811. The next year, he moved to Amherst, where he could live more cheaply. In his new house, he installed his custom-made desk, "two feet wide, built in the form of a hollow circle," on which he placed dictionaries of some twenty languages. Standing in the opening at the center of the table, Webster spent his days turning around in the circle, following the roots of words from one language to the next, his heart racing at the pursuit. (He liked to take his pulse: when he made a discovery, it rose from 60 to 80 or 85 beats a minute.) For the nine years that he lived in Amherst, Webster chased etymologies, round and round.

In 1822, Webster and his family returned to New Haven. Two years later, he sailed to Europe on a research trip that was underwritten by a thousand-dollar loan from his daughter Harriet, who had married into a wealthy West Indian merchant family. In 1825, in a boarding house in Cambridge, England, he finished the dictionary. The manuscript his wife called "the babe

THREE POEMS

Disaster has fallen on everyone, everywhere;
The presence of death is like night.
Devouring pain has swallowed everything—
Then why do we feel such delight?

Days are heavy with cherry-tree fragrance
Drifting from the orchards nearby;
Nights burn with unknown constellations
In the transparent heavens of July.

And something miraculous materializes
Among the ruins, the rubble, the grime—
Something none of us, none of us recognizes,
But has wanted for a long, long time.

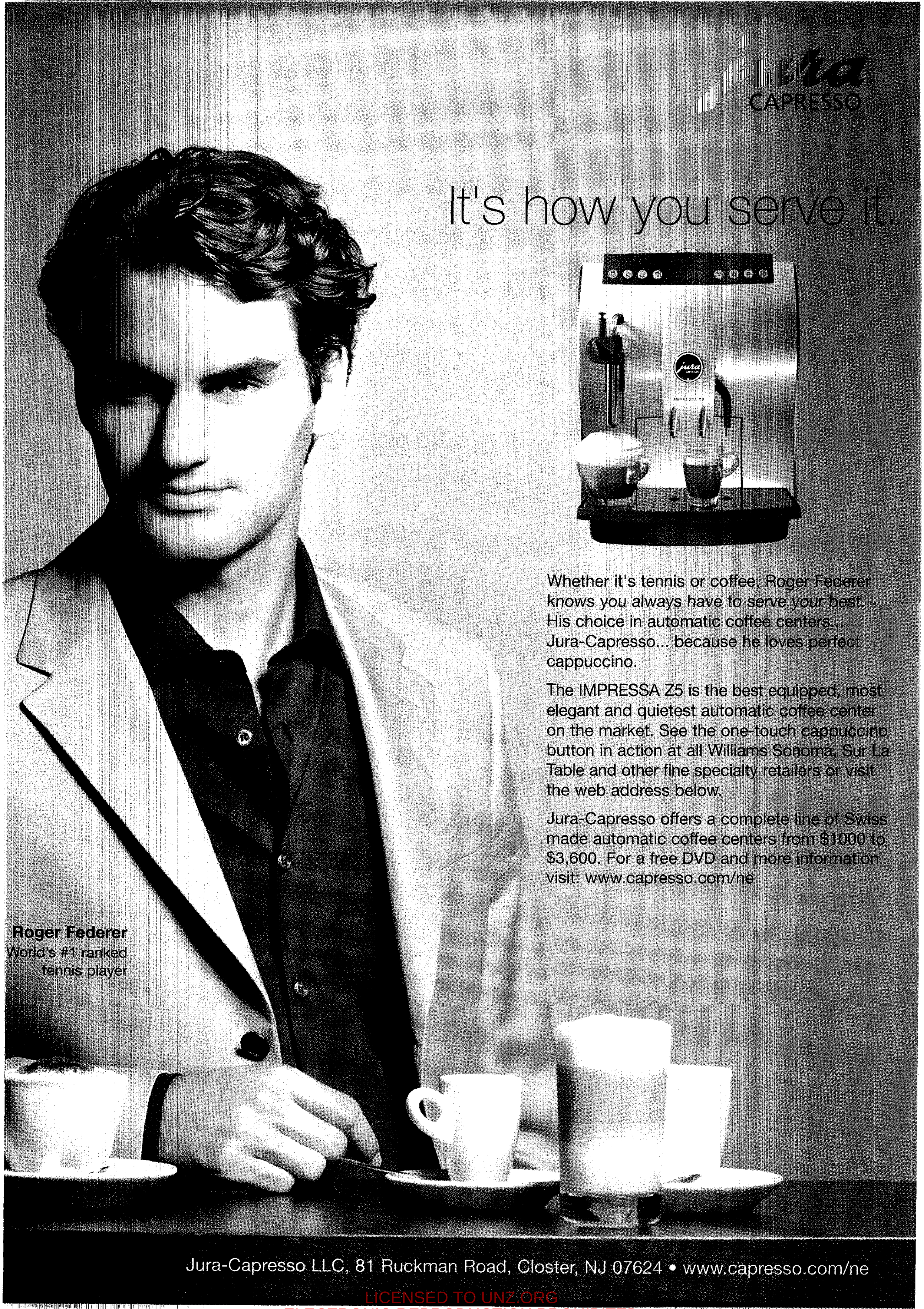
There were three things in life he loved:
Music at Vespers, white peacocks,
And antique maps of America.
He hated children crying
And raspberry jam for tea.
He hated women in hysterics—
And he married me.

I drink to the wreck of our life together,
And the pain of living alone.
I drink to the loneliness we shared—
My dear, I drink to you.

I drink to the trick of a mouth that betrayed me,
To the eyes and the look that lied.
I drink to the terrible world we inhabit
And to God, who never replied.

—*Anna Akhmatova*

(*Translated, from the Russian, by Paul Schmidt.*)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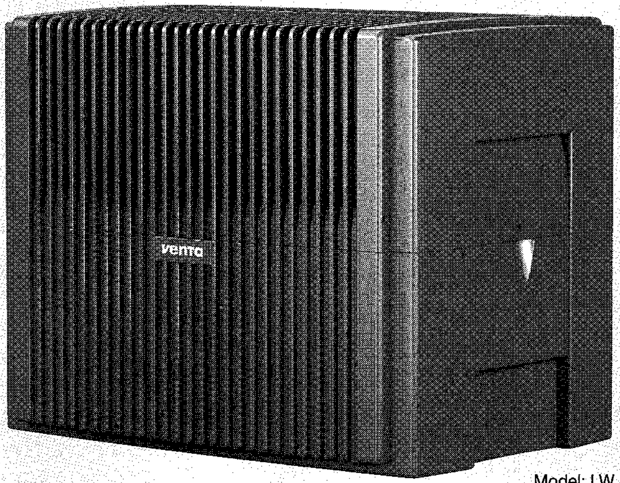

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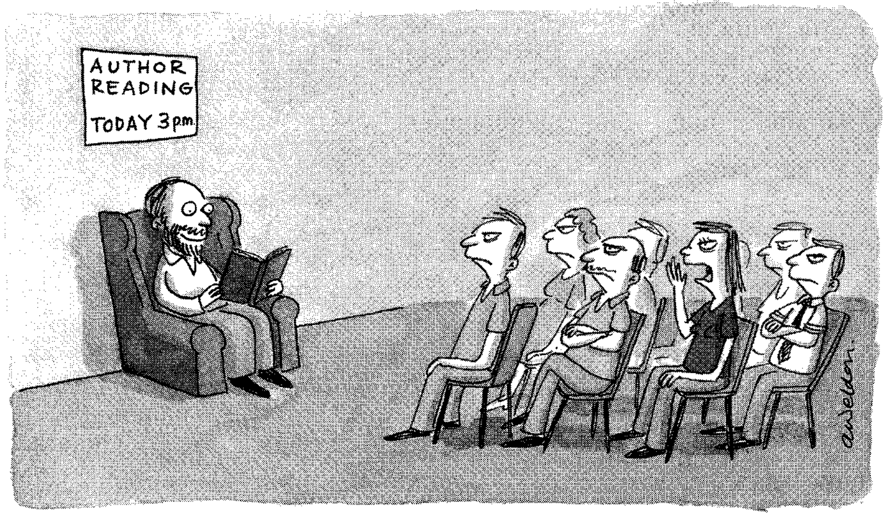
which he had dandled twenty years and more" finally left his lap, to toddle off into history.

By the time Webster's massive, two-volume "American Dictionary of the English Language" was printed, in 1828, the Federalist Party was dead. So was almost everyone Webster had known in his youth, or even his middle age. Republicans from Virginia—Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe—had run the country for a quarter century. Republicanism was so ascendant that Andrew Jackson, who was not only a champion of the common man but also a notoriously bad speller (he spelled "government" with one "n"), had just been elected President. With populism on the rise, no one now disputed the dictionary's embrace of lowly words like "crock." And no one cared about Webster's Federalism. At seventy, Webster had outlived most of his enemies and aged into an anachronism, an elder statesman whose feebleness was mistaken for harmlessness.

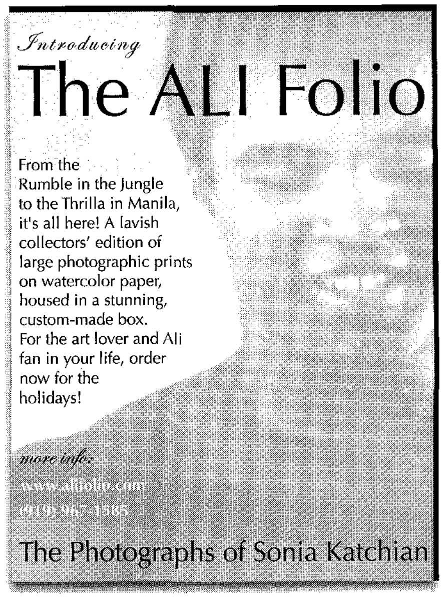
It also helped that he had abandoned simplified spelling. Except for dropping the "k" in words like "mimic" and the "u" in words like "favor," he left spelling alone, and let wimmen be women. He had even quieted his nationalism: the proposed "Dictionary of the American Language" turned out to be "An American Dictionary of the English Language." Now he doubted whether any Americanisms even existed: "As to Americanisms, so called, I have not been able to find many words, in respectable use, which can be so denominated. These, I have admitted and noted as peculiar to this country"—"lengthy," "skunk," "caucus." But, as to the rest, "I have fully ascertained that most of the new words charged to the coinage of this country, were first used in England."

What made Webster's dictionary American was his quoting of American authors—Franklin, Washington, Madison, Irving, and dozens more—to illustrate the meanings of words. He also added plenty of his own patriotic observations ("Inestimable, a. . . . The privileges of American citizens, civil and religious, are *inestimable*") and political opinions ("Preposterous, a. . . . A republican government in the hands of females, is *preposterous*").

At twenty dollars a copy, the American Dictionary didn't exactly fly from the shelves. But it was respected and, soon enough, revered. Webster's definitions were spot on: "Dandy, n. . . . A fop, a coxcomb; one who dresses himself like a doll, and who carries his character on his back." Sir James Murray, the first editor of the "Oxford English Dictionary," called Webster "a born definer of words." Webster was a better definer than Johnson: less literary, but more exact. Johnson defined "admiration" as "wonder; the act of admiring or wondering"; to Webster it was "wonder mingled with pleasing emotions, as approbation, esteem, love or veneration; a compound emotion excited by something novel, rare, great, or excellent; applied to persons and their works. It often



"Aloud!"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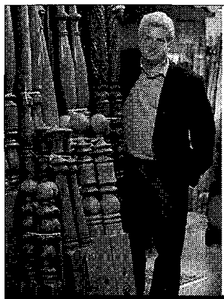
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READER'S CIRCLE

When you see this seal on the outside,
there's a great book-club read inside.

includes a slight degree of surprise."

The ridicule to which Webster had once been exposed now only bolstered his claim to greatness. In the *North American Review*, the Yale scholar James Luce Kingsley wrote, "The author, it is well known, met with much opposition at the commencement of his labors; and it is equally notorious, that as he proceeded in the accomplishment of his design, he was seldom cheered with the voice of encouragement." The fact that, over the labor of so many years, one man, so unrewarded, so alone, had been so undeterred formed no small part of the dictionary's vaunted merit. It was *admired.* Johnson had worked with a team of secretaries and copyists; Webster wrote every word of the dictionary himself, and lacked even the help of an amanuensis. (Though he did have the help of Johnson: according to the literary scholar Joseph Reed, who counted, a third of the definitions in his 1828 dictionary were taken from Johnson, sometimes verbatim. Webster knew a good definition when he saw one.)

But what contributed most to the dictionary's success was its timing: it was published at the height of America's greatest religious revival, the Second Great Awakening. (Webster's own conversion, in 1809, came at the movement's very beginning.) Webster's dictionary was a Christian catechism. It isn't only the just-so, evangelical etymologies. Webster's faith shines through on nearly every page, even under the most unlikely bushels:

> Instrument, n. 2. . . . The distribution of the Scriptures may be the *instrument* of a vastly extensive reformation in morals and religion.
>
> Meritorious, a. . . . We rely for salvation on the *meritorious* obedience and sufferings of Christ.
>
> Love, n. 1. The *love* of God is the first duty of man. . . . v.t. 1. . . . The Christian *loves* his Bible.

Born-again Americans applauded it. "His country owes to him a debt of gratitude, which no monument of marble or of granite can repay," the *Christian Watchman* declared. They loved their Webster's as they loved their Bible. Many still do: today you can buy a handsome facsimile edition of Webster's 1828 dictionary, published by the Foundation for American Christian Education, which plausibly reports that it contains "the greatest number of Biblical definitions given in any secular volume." Webster's Federalist views on politics, his republican opinions about language, the political turmoil that had swallowed up his 1806 dictionary—all these were forgotten. Webster began by writing for his country; he ended up writing for Christ.

In 1826, while his dictionary was still at the typesetter's, Webster turned his attention to the matter of copyright. "Every book I write is a fund for others, who copy what they want & publish it," he once complained, and not without cause. For decades, Webster had defended intellectual property, fighting pirated editions of his spelling books and travelling from state to state arguing for copyright reform. He liked to take credit for the copyright law passed by Congress in 1790. He certainly profited by it. By 1801, his American spelling book—his chief source of income throughout his life—had sold half a million copies; by 1829, it had sold twenty million. Even with copyright laws, most copies of the spelling book were sold in pirated editions. Without that protection, it would have earned Webster almost nothing.

In 1831, when the House of Representatives finally passed a law extending copyright to an author for twenty-eight years and to the author's heirs for fourteen more, Webster was in the gallery, applauding, happy to know that his dictionary would provide a lasting legacy for his children and grandchildren. It did that, but it also condemned them to decades of bickering over his estate. His publishers bickered, too. After Webster's death, in 1843, the Springfield, Massachusetts, publishers George and Charles Merriam, who had acquired the rights from his heirs, began printing revised and abridged editions of the 1828 dictionary (from which Webster's evangelicalism was gradually excised). In the eighteen-fifties and early eighteen-sixties, the Merriam Company waged what became known as the "War of the Dictionaries" against the Cambridge lexicographer Joseph E. Worcester, accusing him of stealing from Webster. *The Atlantic Monthly* took Worcester's side; Congress defended Webster. Only after Merriam published the extraordinarily impressive "Webster's Unabridged," in 1864, did Webster's prevail. But by then

Webster's name was high stakes. Dozens of publishers were printing dictionaries they called "Webster's," reaping the profits of Webster's strangely anonymous fame. Nobody cared anymore who Webster was or had ever been, but the courts were busy for more than a century determining who could use his name. Merriam sued, and sued again. As one court ruled, and most others implied, "The contention that the complainants have any special property in 'Webster's Dictionary' is all nonsense."

Still, for a long time any "Webster's" other than Merriam's had to print a title-page caveat: "This dictionary is not published by the original publishers of Webster's Dictionary or by their successors." In 1982, the Merriam Company, having failed to win the right to Webster's name, changed its own: to "Merriam-Webster Inc." In 1991, the company tried to make the point again, trademarking the phrase "Not just Webster. Merriam-Webster."™

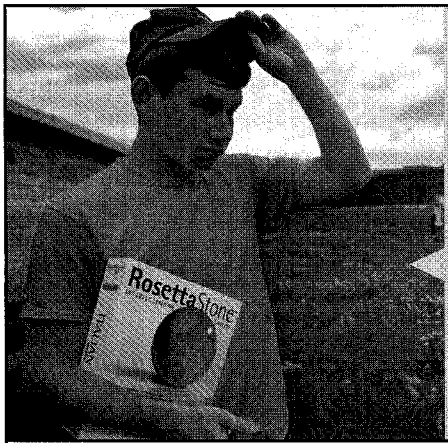
Most American dictionaries now call themselves Webster's, but whether they're Websterian is another question. The Merriam Company published "Webster's New International Dictionary" in 1909; a second edition followed in 1934, and, in 1961, the third, notorious for its permissiveness. In a 1962 Rex Stout novel, Nero Wolfe, the fat detective, throws Webster's Third into a fire, page by page. "Do you use 'infer' and 'imply' interchangeably?" Wolfe asks a guest. "This book says you may. Pfui." In this magazine, Dwight Macdonald complained that Webster's Third had debased the language "in the name of democracy." The dictionary's editorial staff had called for a show of hands to make decisions about words and usage. Macdonald challenged both the method and its premise: "If nine-tenths of the citizens of the United States, including a recent President, were to use *invidu-ous*, the one-tenth who clung to *invidious* would still be right, and they would be doing a favor to the majority if they continued to maintain the point."

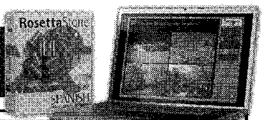
It's probably a good thing Macdonald isn't around to browse through the Wiktionary, the online, user-written dictionary launched in 2002 by Wikipedia, and billed as the future of lexicography. There's no show of hands at Wiktionary. There's not even an editorial staff. "Be your own lexicographer!" might be Wiktionary's motto. Who needs experts? Why pay good money for a dictionary written by lexicographers when we can cobble one together ourselves?

Wiktionary isn't so much republican or democratic as Maoist. And it's only as good as the copyright-expired books from which it pilfers. If you look up the word "Webster" in the Wiktionary, you will be redirected to this handy tip:

> Noah Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, 1911 (published by Merriam-Webster, Springfield, MA) is a public domain dictionary, as is a 1913 edition, that can be used to empower Wiktionary with more definitions.

Pfui. But, hey, at least they got his first name right. ♦





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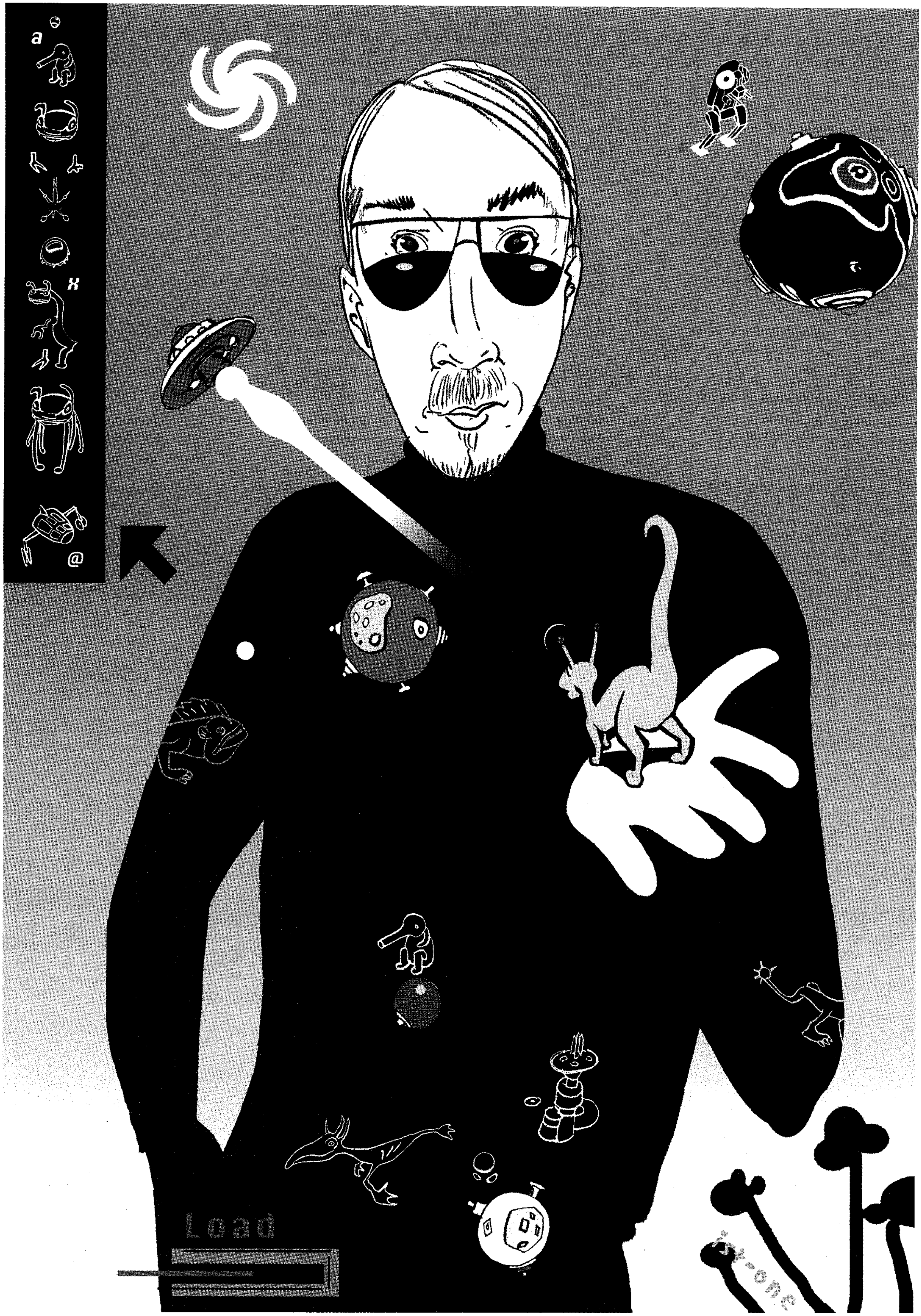
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PROFILES

GAME MASTER

Will Wright changed the concept of video games with the Sims. Can he do it again with Spore?

BY JOHN SEABROOK

In 1972, an engineer and former carnival barker named Nolan Bushnell started a video-game company, in Santa Clara, California. As an engineering student at the University of Utah in the nineteen-sixties, Bushnell had become obsessed with an early computer game called Spacewar. The game's developers, a group of graduate students who were part of the Tech Model Railroad Club, at M.I.T., an early proving ground of computer hackers, had never considered selling the game; their idea was to demonstrate the appeal of interactivity, and to take a first small step toward simulating intelligent life on a computer. Bushnell's ambition was more worldly. He wanted to manufacture coin-operated game-playing machines and license them to amusement arcades. He foresaw a new kind of midway hustle, in which the hustler would be inside the machine. "The things I had learned about getting you to spend a quarter on me in one of my midway games," he later said, "I put those sales pitches in my automated box." From this unlikely marriage—the computer lab and the carnival—the video-game industry was born.

The first product of Bushnell's company, Atari, was Pong, a simple, elegant game in which two players manipulated electronic paddles and sent a blip back and forth across a black-and-white screen. The game had two basic components. It was a simulation of table tennis, managing to render most of the game's rules, structure, and logic onto the screen. And it was an animation—a moving picture designed to complete the feedback loop between the eyes, the brain, and the fingers on the game controls. The game was designed by a former All-State football player named Al Alcorn, who was Atari's second employee. As Heather Chaplin and Aaron Ruby tell the story in "Smartbomb," their recently published history of the industry, Bushnell took the handmade Pong game to Andy Capp's Tavern, in nearby Sunnyvale, and within weeks people were lining up outside the bar in the morning, before opening time, to play it. By 1974, Pong had made it to a pizza parlor in Hanover, New Hampshire, where I played it, and for the rest of that summer my dearest desire was to go back and play it again.

The games that followed Pong—Space Invaders, Asteroids, Missile Command, and Pac-Man, among others—were even more captivating, but the simulations remained the stuff of arcades and midways: sports, space aliens, zombies, shoot-'em-ups. In the nineteen-eighties, as the speed and storage capacity of computers and game-playing consoles grew, designers continued to improve the graphics. The simulation side of the games, however, never came close to realizing the Tech Model Railroad Club's old ambition of reproducing real-life dynamics on the screen. The best-selling video game this year is Madden NFL, in which you get to play pro football from the perspective of star players. Madden NFL is a far more sophisticated simulation than Pong was, but the content of the game is no closer to real life.

In the late nineteen-eighties, a new type of video game quietly emerged—the God game. Computer animation is a brute-force project of converting graphic art into two-dimensional pixels, and, more recently, into three-dimensional polygons, the building blocks of digital pictures. But to create a truly absorbing simulation, one that offers some insight into the nature of real life, is a much more difficult proposition. The designer must play God, or at least the notion of God in Boethius' "Consolation of Philosophy"—a god that can anticipate the outcome of the player's actions and yet allows the player the feeling of free will.

Among the pioneers of the God game was Peter Molyneux, of Great Britain, who created Populous, in 1989. The game gives the player omniscient power over a variety of simulated societies. (You can help them or torture them as you wish, although your actions have consequences in the game.) Another important God-game designer, Sid Meier, has based his Civilization series, which began to appear in 1991, on historical processes, such as scientific discovery, war, and diplomacy. But the master of the genre—the god of God games—is Will Wright. Beginning in 1989, with SimCity, in which the object is to design and manage a modern city, and continuing with The Sims, in 2000, in which you care for a family in an ordinary suburban environment, Wright created situations that redefined the boundaries of what a game can be. "It occurred to me that most books and movies tend to be about realistic situations," he has said. "Why shouldn't games be?" To game designers, Wright is the Zola of the form: the man who moved the subject matter of games away from myth, fantasy, and violence and toward ordinary social life.

For the past six years, Wright has been working on a new game, which will be released in 2007. It is anticipated with something like the interest with which writers in Paris in the early twenties awaited Joyce's "Ulysses." At first, Wright called the project Sim Everything, but a few years ago he settled on the name Spore. The game draws on the theory of natural selection. It seeks to replicate algorithmically the conditions by which evolution works, and render the process as a game. Conceptually, Spore is radical: at a time when most game makers are offering ever more dazzling graphics and

Wright is betting that players want to create stories and environments—that what they really like is exploring "possibility space."

scenarios and stories, Wright and his backer, Electronic Arts, are betting that players want to create the environments and stories themselves—that what players really like about games is exploring what Wright calls "possibility space." "Will has a reality-distortion field around him," his former business partner, Jeff Braun, told me. "He comes up with the craziest idea you've ever heard, and when he's finished explaining it to you the world looks crazy—he's the only sane person in it."

Wright's office is in a corner of a six-story building a few blocks from San Francisco Bay, in Emeryville, California. It has a balcony where he can smoke. The walls are covered with drawings in colored markers, which bear cryptic messages like "Star Map Issues." Wright, who is forty-six, is tall and skinny, with a long, narrow face and slender fingers. He dresses in more or less the same clothes every day—black New Balance sneakers, faded black jeans, a button-down shirt, a leather jacket, and thick aviator-style glasses. His skin is shiny and reddish-brown, in that way that a smoker's skin can look—half tanned and half cured. He sometimes has a wispy mustache and goatee. You don't really have a conversation with him; you mention an idea, and that triggers five or ten associations in Wright's mind, which he delivers in quick bursts of data that are strung together with "um"s.

When I walked into his office, Wright jumped up and, after shaking my hand, said, "Here, try this, um, it's this really cool toy I found recently," and handed me a wireless controller for a small robotic tank that was sitting on the floor. It was facing another tank, which Wright was controlling. He started moving his tank around and shooting mine, watching me curiously, waiting to see how long it would take me to understand what was going on. I felt an odd tingling sensation in my hands, but I didn't pay any attention to it at first. Eventually, I realized that I was getting shocked: every time Wright's tank shot mine, an electric charge passed from the controller into my hands.

Wright had been working on a PowerPoint presentation of a talk he had been asked to give about Spore. "It's supposed to be about how I came up with the game, but what I really want to talk about is the history of astrobiology, so I'm doing both," he said. He moved over to the two computers in his office and clicked through some images, while describing the basic structure of Spore. At first, I was baffled. Up to this point in his career, Wright has been including more and more social realism in his games. But Spore is a surprise—at a glance, it looks like a "cartoony bug game," as one contributor to a gaming Web site put it. The buildings don't have the crisp urban lines of SimCity; they look more like the architecture in Dr. Seuss books. Wright has also introduced weapons and conquest. The violence isn't gratuitous—in some cases, you have to kill to survive—but it isn't sugar-coated, either. Not only do you kill other creatures in Spore but you have to eat them.

At the first level of the game, you are a single-celled organism in a drop of water, which is represented on the screen as a two-dimensional environment, like a slide under a microscope. By successfully avoiding predators, which are represented as different-colored cells, you get to reproduce, and that earns you DNA points (a double helix appears over your character). DNA is the currency in the early levels of Spore, and as you evolve you can acquire better parts—larger flippers for faster swimming, say, or sharper claws for defeating predators. Eventually, you emerge from the water onto the second level—dry land—and your creature must compete with other creatures, and mate with those of your own kind which the computer generates, until you form a tribe. You can play a violent game of conquest over other tribes or you can play a social game of conciliation. If you make clever choices, according to the logic of the simulation, you will survive and continue to evolve. Along the way, you get to acquire ever more powerful tools and weapons, and to create dwellings, towns, cities. When your city has conquered the other cities in your world, you can build a spaceship and launch into space. By the final level, you have evolved into an intergalactic god who can travel throughout the universe conducting interplanetary diplomacy and warfare.

The images that Wright called up on the computer were supposed to illustrate the game, but they gave little sense of what it would look like. There was a slide that showed the equation for gravity, a slide about panspermia theory (the idea that life on earth began with organic matter brought from space by comets and other "dirty snowballs"), and a picture of the cast of the early-eighties TV show "The Dukes of Hazzard." Wright paused to say that, according to his calculations, based on the speed of radio waves, a hundred and fifty stars have received "The Dukes of Hazzard" by now.

Spore isn't a multiplayer game, like the immensely popular World of Warcraft, which runs on "massively parallel" computers (a distributed system employing many networked machines); it's what Wright jokingly calls a massively parallel single-player game. If you enable an Internet feature, Spore servers will "pollinate" your copy of the game with content created by other players. In order to create the best content for your style of play—"the right kind of ecosystem for your creature," as Wright puts it—Spore builds a model of how you play the game, and searches for other players' content that fits that model. If you create a hyperaggressive Darwinian monster, for example, the game might download equally cutthroat opponents to test you. In other words, while you are playing the game, the game is playing you.

Wright asked if I would like to try the Spore "creature editor," which is the first major design tool in the game. On the screen was a kidney-shaped blob that looked like Mr. Potato Head before you add the features. Wright showed me the menus for creating my creature's skeleton, body, eyes, and skin. I used the mouse to stretch the blob into a torso, changing the shape and length of the spine as I did so. I chose the parts from the left side of the screen—flippers, beaks, three-jointed legs—all of which would cost DNA points at this stage of the game. Wright explained, "You can choose different mouths—carnivore, herbivore, omnivore—which will determine not only how you will eat in the world but what type of voice the creature has." On the right side of the screen were graphics that showed the evolutionary advantages and consequences of each choice—speed, power, stealth, etc. Switching to the paint menu, I applied a base coat of purple, then some orange stripes; the computer automatically shaded the colors, so that my creature's skin looked professionally textured.

"O.K., now go to test mode," Wright said.

I clicked a button and my creature sprang to life and started lumbering around the screen. It was a goofy-looking thing—a hammer-fisted apatosaurus with a potbelly, a long neck, and floppy dog ears. But it was a fully animated character, something that Pixar might have created, and I had made it in about three minutes. I felt as if I were playing with digital clay.

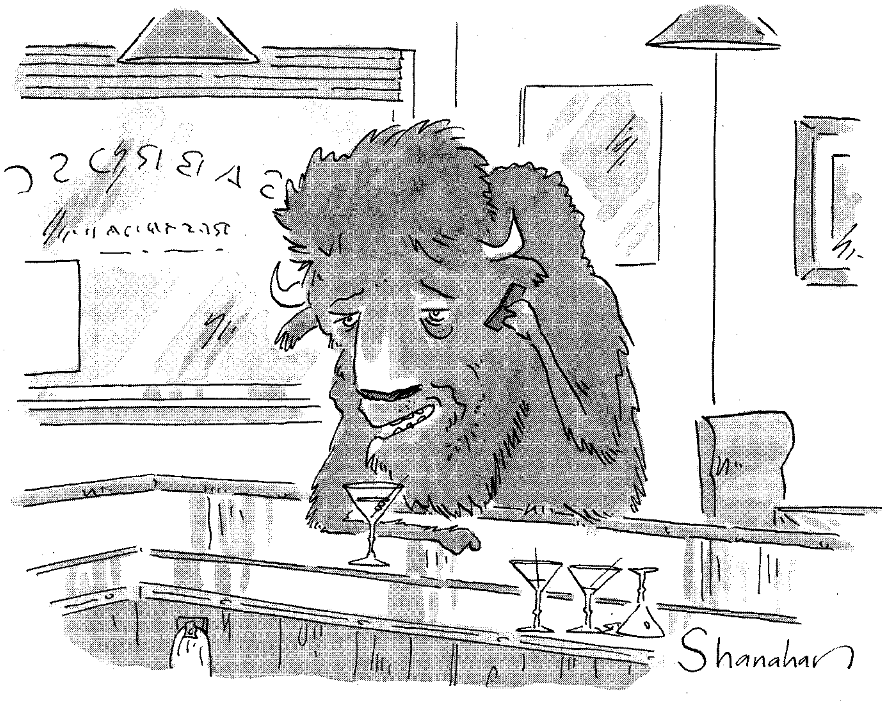
Electronic Arts is the largest producer of video games in the world, with more than seven thousand employees, and studios in North America, Europe, and Asia. It makes or licenses software for many game-playing platforms, including computer games for P.C.s and Macs; console games for Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft game boxes; handheld games for the Nintendo Game Boy (and the new Nintendo DS) and for the Sony PSP; and online games for playing on the Web. Most recently, E.A. has begun to make "mobile games," for playing on cell phones, a new and rapidly growing market.

E.A. was founded in 1982 by Trip Hawkins, a former marketing manager at Apple Computer, as "the new Hollywood," and it was at first supposed to be a haven for video-game auteurs. Hawkins proposed to treat designers, who had hitherto been regarded as mere engineers, as artists, and to design sexy packaging that would evoke album covers, with the names of the creators emblazoned on the front. "Can a video game make you cry?" was one of the company's early challenges. Over the years, E.A. shifted its strategy toward games based on "proven content"—licensed stories and characters from film, sports, and TV, rendered in game form. (More recently, it has focussed on creating its own intellectual property.) E.A. has also developed sports-simulation games, based on professional sports leagues, featuring the players themselves. As Steven L. Kent recounts in "The Ultimate History of Video Games," it began in 1984, with Dr. J and Larry Bird Go One-on-One, a basketball game for which E.A. paid Erving and Bird to use their names and images. Since then, E.A. has created a sports-gaming empire. The latest version of Madden NFL, which was originally published in 1990, sold two million copies in its first week of release this August. In recent years, the company has acquired a Microsoft-like reputation for hard-nosed business practices—buying smaller development studios that can no longer afford the rising costs of game production, and shutting out potential competitors with exclusive licensing deals.

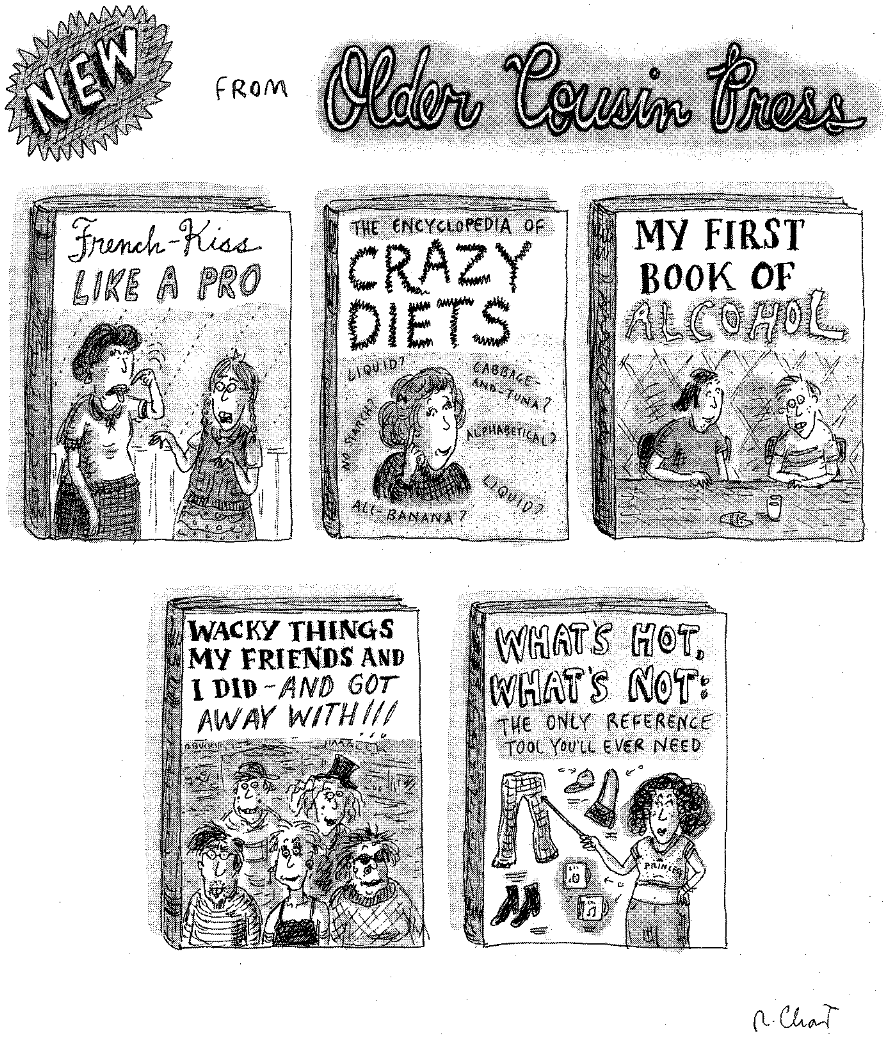
The E.A. campus is in Redwood Shores, California, at the northern edge of Silicon Valley. Employees dress in shorts; there's a gym; the games in the company store are less than half price; and several meeting rooms are designed to look like sports bars. But, according to two class-action suits for "unpaid overtime," one filed by E.A. game artists and another by programmers, working for E.A. hasn't always been as much fun as it appears to be. Although both suits have been settled and E.A. has revised its overtime policy, during crunch times eighty-hour weeks continue to be the norm.

While I was at E.A., I was given a demonstration of The Godfather, one of the company's new games. You begin as a low-level criminal and attempt to become, through the clever use of violence and extortion, the head of the crime family. One of the game's innovations is that, in addition to killing opponents, you can also wound them by shooting them in the kneecaps or shoulders—and if you only wound them you can still extort money from them, and thereby advance in the game. I also saw the latest installment of the Tiger Woods golf franchise. The golfer allowed E.A. to attach motion sensors to his body and face, and the data were rendered in computer graphics. The result is, among other things, a remarkable computer-animated version of Woods's famous smile—the way the upper lip slides up over the teeth is perfect. After hitting a good drive, you get to hear Woods whisper, "On the screws, Tiger."

After the demos, I met Larry Probst, the fifty-six-year-old chief executive of E.A., who started in the company's sales department in 1984. Probst explained that E.A. allowed Wright to put together a development team by choosing some of the most talented artists and programmers from E.A.'s vast network of game makers. The company also constructed a separate headquarters for the seventy-five-member team in Emeryville, about fifty miles north of the corporate campus, near Orinda, where Wright was living. It was counting on Spore to help shore up its bottom line. The company's stock price had dropped



"Stampeding off a metaphoric cliff—and you?"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almost thirty per cent since April, and its sales figures were twenty per cent lower than last year's. Probst blamed the company's problems on one of the cyclical downturns that hits the game industry every four or five years, when a new generation of gaming machines become available; this fall, both the PlayStation 3, from Sony, and Nintendo's Wii system go on sale. Traditionally, gamers stop buying the current generation of games in anticipation of those which will be developed for the new machines.

But there are reasons to believe that E.A.'s problems are more systemic—indeed, that the entire game industry is on the verge of a fundamental restructuring. Not since the early nineteen-eighties, when video games began moving from amusement arcades into homes, has the future seemed so uncertain. While each generation of hardware offers the capacity for increasingly realistic graphics—like Tiger's smile—it also requires producers to devote more programming hours to filling that capacity. Twenty years ago, it was possible for one man to create an entire video game; today, development teams of a hundred or more are the norm. Moreover, E.A.'s basic product, which is a boxed game costing around fifty dollars, isn't as appealing as it once was. Many adult players prefer "casual games," which can be played on cell phones and in shorter sessions online. Instead of buying games at a store and bringing them home, customers want games they can get on the Web. Just as some in the film industry have begun to wonder about the economic feasibility of films that cost upward of fifty million dollars to produce, so people in the game industry wonder whether big-budget games can survive in a climate that favors downloadable games that are cheap, short-lived, and disposable.

During our conversation, Probst seemed most enthusiastic about the market for casual games, especially games for cell phones, which earned E.A. more than a hundred million dollars last year. "Think about what happens when three billion Chinese people have cell phones," he said at one point. But how do you convince a casual gamer, who is just looking for distraction, to play a game that is about evolution, city building, conquest, and interstellar travel? I asked Probst about this, and he said, "You tell people it's a Will Wright game."

Wright belongs to the last generation of game designers (and, indeed, human beings) who grew up before personal computers and game consoles existed. He built models of things as a kid: "ships, cars, planes—I loved to do that," he told me. When Will was ten, he built a balsa-wood replica of the flight deck on the Enterprise, which won an award at a Star Trek convention. He was also fond of the board games made by Avalon Hill, such as PanzerBlitz, a strategy game loosely based on tank warfare on the Eastern Front.

Wright's father, Will, Sr., and grandfather were graduates of Georgia Tech's engineering school, and Wright keeps their graduation pictures hanging on a wall in his house, alongside a picture of himself. His forebears are crewcut men in sober suits, about to embark on successful careers in making useful things. Then, there's Will, Jr., who never graduated from college, and who didn't fit into the family tradition—a gangly man-boy with a sweet, slightly stoned-looking grin. "Something went wrong with this one," Wright said, peering at the picture.

In the nineteen-sixties, Wright's father developed a new way of making plastic packing materials and started a successful company, which allowed the Wrights to live comfortably in Atlanta. Will's dad was also an excellent golfer. His mother, Beverlye Wright Edwards, was an amateur magician and actress. Wright flourished in the local Montessori school, with its emphasis on creativity, problem solving, and self-motivation. "Montessori taught me the joy of discovery," Wright told me. "It showed you can become interested in pretty complex theories, like Pythagorean theory, say, by playing with blocks. It's all about learning on your terms, rather than a teacher explaining stuff to you. SimCity comes right out of Montessori—if you give people this model for building cities, they will abstract from it principles of urban design."

In the evening, Will and his father would sit on the porch and talk about the stars, NASA's Apollo program, and the possibility of life on other planets. Wright was planning to be an astronaut, and his goal was to create colonies in space that would help relieve the pressure of overpopulation. His father thought this was a wonderful idea.

When Will was nine, his father died of leukemia, and his mother took him and his younger sister, Whitney, back to Baton Rouge, her home town. Will went to Episcopal, a conventional prep school. He didn't like it as much as the Montessori school, although he enjoyed discussions about God with the faculty. "That's where I became an atheist," he said. He started at Louisiana State University when he was sixteen; two years later, he transferred to Louisiana Tech. He excelled only in subjects that he was interested in: architecture, economics, mechanical engineering, military history. He had impractical goals—in addition to starting colonies in space, he wanted to build robots. He dropped out again after two years, drove a bulldozer for a summer, and then, in the fall of 1980, went to the New School, in Manhattan, where he studied robotics. He lived in an apartment over Balducci's, in Greenwich Village, and spent a lot of time on Canal Street scrounging parts from the surplus electronics stores that used to line the street and using them to build a robotic arm.

In the summer of 1980, Wright answered an ad in a car magazine: Richard Doherty, a rally enthusiast, was looking for participants to compete in a point-to-point race between Farmingdale, Long Island, and Redondo Beach, California. Wright had a Mazda RX-7, which he and Doherty modified with a larger fuel tank and a roll cage. They wore night-vision goggles so that they could drive fast in the dark without headlights and avoid the cops. "Will said we should take the southern route, even though it was longer, because if we got stopped he'd be able to talk to the cops," Doherty told me. "We did get stopped in Georgia. We were doing a hundred and twenty, with no headlights, but it didn't take Will more than a couple of minutes to make the officer see why he had to let us go without a ticket." They won the race, establishing a new record of thirty-four hours and nine minutes.

After a year at the New School, Wright went back to Baton Rouge to live with his best friend. His family expected Will to take over the plastics company, but Will wasn't interested. (Eventually, they sold the business.) Souping up cars for rally racing was his main passion that summer, until his roommate's sister, Joell Jones, came to Baton Rouge for a visit. Jones was eleven years older than Wright; their families had been friends and he had known her when he was a teen-ager. Now she lived in Oakland, where she was a painter and a social activist. She was back in Baton Rouge to recuperate after severing a nerve in her wrist. To extend the range of motion in her hand, Wright built a device out of metal and rubber bands. "Will would talk to me passionately about the need to colonize space, and I would say that it was more important to feed people on earth," Jones told me. "Somehow we fell in love." When Jones went back to Oakland, Wright asked if he could come and live with her; she agreed, on the condition that he didn't interfere with her painting. They married in 1984.

In the early nineteen-eighties, coin-operated machines began to decline in popularity and home-video games began to take hold. Atari, which had popularized home-gaming consoles, was superseded by Nintendo, a venerable Japanese playing-card company, with its Nintendo Entertainment System. As hardware, the N.E.S. was an improvement over the Atari machines (Atari's joystick controller was replaced with the directional "+" pad, which the player operated with his thumbs), but it was software, in the form of a Nintendo game cartridge called Super Mario Bros., that made Nintendo the industry leader. Shigeru Miyamoto, who had designed Nintendo's Donkey Kong for arcades, redesigned the game, changing the carpenter in the game, whose name was Jumpman, to a plumber, whom he called Mario, and adding a brother named Luigi and a far greater array of aids (golden coins, magic mushrooms), obstacles (fire-spitting enemies), and underground passageways, many of them drawn from Miyamoto's boyhood memories of exploring caves in the mountains near his home in Sonobe.

By the time Super Mario appeared, the syntax for game play was firmly established; it remains the standard grammar today. The player progresses through the game by defeating antagonists, restoring his energy with "power-ups" he finds along the way, accumulating bonus points to rise to progressively harder levels, many of which feature a "boss" who must be defeated in order to earn a "save game" and not have to repeat the level. Although Super Mario, which débuted in the United States in 1985, had a goal (to rescue Princess Peach from a giant reptile named Bowser), it also encouraged exploration for its own sake; in this regard, it was less like a competitive game than a "software toy"—a concept that influenced Will Wright's notion of possibility space. "The breadth and the scope of the game really blew me away," Wright told me. "It was made out of these simple elements, and it worked according to simple rules, but it added up to this very complex design."

In the late nineties, Sony's PlayStation console replaced the N.E.S. as the dominant home game-playing system, and Microsoft's Xbox, introduced in 2001, is now the second-best-selling machine. But neither Sony nor Microsoft has had Nintendo's influence on basic game design.

In 1991, yet another phase in the game business began when a young programmer named John Carmack, who was, together with John Romero, a partner in a Dallas-based company called id Software, figured out how to program 3-D graphics for a P.C., enabling the designers to give more depth to interior spaces and to create more realistic movements. According to "Masters of

Doom," David Kushner's 2003 book, when Romero first saw Carmack's 3-D program, he exclaimed, "This is it. We're gone!" Romero designed the graphics and game play for an ultra-violent game, which called on his own love of nineteen-fifties horror comics published by Evergreen, combined with a heavy-metal sensibility. The result was Doom, the defining first-person shooter, in which you play a "space marine," and the object is to kill the zombies that come at you as you advance deeper into Hell. Everything about the game was designed to inflame a teen-age boy's fantasies of power while causing grave distress to his parents. In 1999, the elders' worst fears about the antisocial effects of first-person shooters seemed to be realized when Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, the teen-agers who massacred twelve of their classmates and one teacher at Columbine High School, in Colorado, were revealed to be obsessive players of Doom. Congressional hearings on violence in video games followed. More recently, the San Andreas version of the Grand Theft Auto series, in which the object is to pimp and steal your way to the top (you can get power-ups from mugging prostitutes), caused Hillary Clinton to co-sponsor the Family Entertainment Protection Act, which would ban the sale of violent games to minors. Clinton also accused the makers of violent and sexually explicit games of "stealing the innocence of our children and making the difficult job of being a parent even harder."

One day in his office, Wright showed me an e-mail he had received from Lara M. Brown, a professor of political science at California State University, Channel Islands, in response to an essay he had written for *Wired* about the educational value of video games. Brown, who uses technology in her own teaching, wrote, "Most of us are in agreement that this younger generation—raised on video games—has learned to be reactive, instead of active, and worse, they have lost their imaginative abilities and creativity because the games provide all of the images, sounds, and possible outcomes for them. Our students tend to not know how to initiate questions, formulate hypotheses, or lead off a debate because they like to wait to see what 'comes at them.' They also have difficulty imagining worlds (places and/or historical times) unless you (as a professor) can provide them with a picture and a sound to go along with the words. . . . In essence, they seem to have lost the ability to visualize with their minds."

Wright, though, believes that video games teach you how to learn; what needs to change is the way children are taught. "The problem with our education system is we've taken this kind of narrow, reductionist, Aristotelian approach to what learning is," he told me. "It's not designed for experimenting with complex systems and navigating your way through them in an intuitive way, which is what games teach. It's not really designed for failure, which is also something games teach. I mean, I think that failure is a better teacher than success. Trial and error, reverse-engineering stuff in your mind—all the ways that kids interact with games—that's the kind of thinking schools should be teaching. And I would argue that as the world becomes more complex, and as outcomes become less about success or failure, games are better at preparing you. The education system is going to realize this sooner or later. It's starting. Teachers are entering the system who grew up playing games. They're going to want to engage with the kids using games."

FICTION
Gahan Wilson

"I'd just like to congratulate you on how skillfully you've hidden my novel!"

Shortly after moving in with Jones, Wright began making a helicopter simulator on his personal computer (a Commodore 64). Eventually, the simulator evolved into a shoot-'em-up in which the player flies the helicopter over various cities and islands, trying to bomb buildings and blow up bridges. Wright showed the game to Gary and Doug Carlston, the founders of Broderbund, one of the earliest P.C.-gaming software companies. In 1984, Broderbund brought it out as a P.C. game called Raid on Bungling Bay, and it appeared as a Nintendo cartridge the following year. It was only a moderate success for the P.C., but it sold a million cartridges, mainly in Japan, and because of Nintendo's generous royalty agreement with Broderbund, Wright says, "I made enough money to live on for several years."

In designing Raid on Bungling Bay, Wright noticed that he "was more interested in creating the buildings on the islands than in blowing them up." He started thinking of a game in which the point would be to design buildings, or, maybe, to build a city. A neighbor suggested that Wright take a look at a 1969 book called "Urban Dynamics," by Jay Wright Forrester, an M.I.T. professor, which argued that urban planning could be carried out more rationally by a computer simulation than by humans, because the computer wouldn't be blinded by intuitive biases. In a later book, "World Dynamics," Forrester laid out his proposal for a simulation that could manage the entire planet.

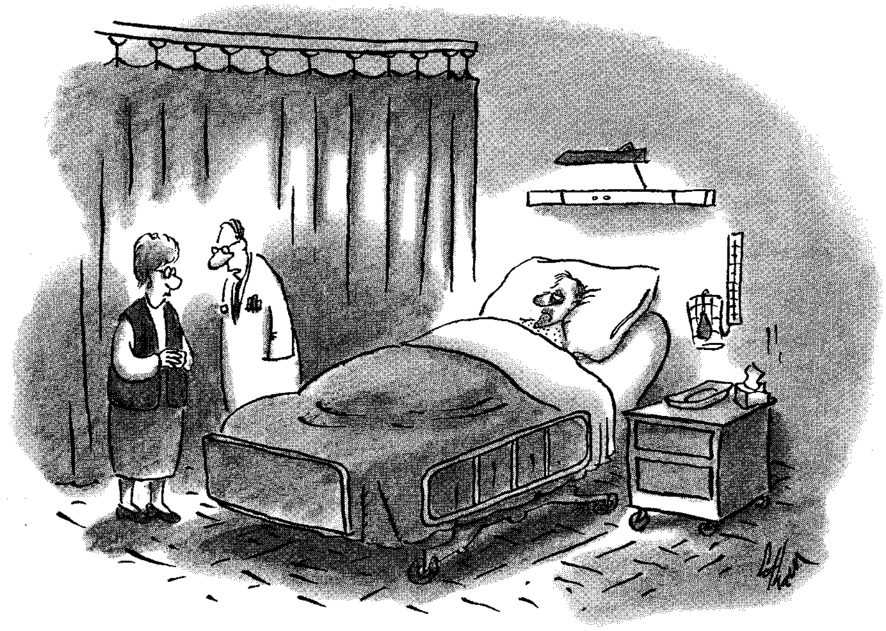
Computer simulations had been around since the nineteen-fifties, when military planners, climatologists, and economic forecasters began programming models of particular scenarios and dynamics, and using them to predict outcomes. One early and well-known biological simulation was the Game of Life, created by a mathematician named John Horton Conway, in 1970. The game, which simulated the growth and death of a living creature, was based on the principle of "cellular automata," in which the programmer assigns simple rules to discrete units, or cells. It can be played on a plain two-dimensional grid, in which black squares represent live cells and white squares represent dead ones. Each cell reacts to the state of the cells around it. The rules are: (1) any live cell with fewer than two live neighbors dies of loneliness; (2) any live cell with more than three neighbors dies of overcrowding; (3) any live cell with two or three neighbors lives; (4) any dead cell with three neighbors returns to life. Conway's purpose was to show how a simple structure of cells could be organized algorithmically to simulate complex, lifelike systems in which unpredictable or "emergent" outcomes occur.

Wright figured out how to combine Forrester's and Conway's ideas to imitate the dynamics of a city. The player would be responsible for adjusting around a hundred variables in a way that allows the city to thrive. You establish transportation networks, power grids, hospitals, and schools. Each decision affects many other variables: a rising crime rate leads to a declining population, which erodes the tax base, which requires the cutting of some essential services—less funding for the hospital, for example.

Wright built a prototype of the game and worked on it for Broderbund, but the company could not see the commercial potential for a game you couldn't win. Eventually, Broderbund gave back the game's rights to Wright, and he set out to find a backer.

One night, at a pizza party in Alameda, Wright met Jeff Braun, a young businessman who was looking to get into video games. As Braun explained, "Will showed me the game and he said, 'No one likes it, because you can't win.' But I thought it was great. I foresaw an audience of megalomaniacs who want to control the world." Together, they founded Maxis, and brought out SimCity in 1989. (Broderbund eventually joined the venture as a distributor; by then Wright had added a feature that allowed players to destroy their cities with various disasters—a volcano, an earthquake, an alien attack, a meteorite shower.)

SimCity was slow to catch on, but seventeen years later the game has earned the company two hundred and thirty million dollars. A sizable number of players who first became interested in urban design as a result of the game have gone on to become architects and designers, making SimCity arguably the single most influential work of urban-design theory ever created.



"It's a virulent form of voter disgust."

• •

In 1986, Wright and Jones had a daughter, Cassidy, and Jones made Wright promise to share the parenting equally so that she could continue painting. "He really did stick to that," she told me. "He spent a lot of time with Cassidy." While he was at home with his daughter, Wright began to turn over the idea for a new game, a kind of interactive doll house that adults would like as much as children. "I went around my house looking at all my objects, asking myself, 'What's the least number of motives or needs that would justify all this crap in my house?' There should be some reason for everything in my house. What's the reason?"

One morning in 1991, as Wright awoke in his house in the Oakland Hills, he thought he smelled smoke and called 911. Over the next half hour, the smoke got worse. "I thought, Uh-oh, this isn't trending well." He and his wife decided it was time to evacuate (Cassidy was away at a friend's house). They grabbed some family photos, jumped into Jones's car, and drove away. When they returned, three days later, the Oakland Hills firestorm had destroyed everything. Nothing was left except for some lumps of melted metal, the remains of their other car. In the months that followed, as Wright went about replacing his belongings, he started thinking about all the things people needed. "I hate to shop," he said, "and I was forced to buy all these things, from toothpaste, utensils, and socks up to furniture."

Three works helped Wright understand how he could turn these life experiences into a game. One was the book “A Pattern Language,” by Christopher Alexander and his colleagues at the Center for Environmental Structure, in Berkeley. The book identifies two hundred and fifty-three timeless ways of building, which are classified as patterns—“Stair Seats,” “Children’s Realm,” etc.—and it shows how these patterns can create satisfying living spaces. The idea is that the value of architecture can be measured by the happiness of the people who live in it. The second was the psychologist Abraham Maslow’s 1943 paper “A Theory of Human Motivation,” in which Maslow described a pyramid-shaped hierarchy of human needs, with “Physiological” at the bottom, and above it “Safety,” “Love,” “Esteem,” and, at the top, “Self-actualization.” The third inspiration was Charles Hampden-Turner’s “Maps of the Mind,” which compares more than fifty theories about how the mind works. Putting these works together, Wright formulated a model with which to “score” the happiness of the people in his doll house by their status, popularity, and success, and by the quality of the environment the player designs for them—the more comfortable the house, the happier the people. Wright told me, “I don’t believe any one theory of human psychology is correct. The Sims just ended up being a mishmash of stuff that worked in the game.”

FIRST DAYS BACK AT WORK

If I can pannier
a pinhead’s worth of pollen
back to the desk—

If like the emperor penguin
I could lay
one egg,
warm its delicate
surprises on
my toes—

Such nimble kneaders, my fingers
used to be.
Will the loaf still rise?

I strain
like an old tug
hauling copses of logs.

—*Elise Partridge*

From a technical perspective, Wright’s singular achievement in The Sims was to design a new kind of “object-oriented” operating system that modelled the complexity of social dynamics. As Chris Hecker, one of the developers on the Spore team, explained to me, “In Will’s games, the objects themselves are encoded to interact with the environment around them. So if you introduce an espresso machine you buy from the online Sims mall, the Sims will be able to make espresso without having to reprogram the game. All you have to do is drop the object into the environment and it will make other stuff happen. The objects create ‘verbs,’ as we say.”

The original Sims had eight motives or needs—hunger, hygiene, bladder, comfort, energy, social, fun, and room—all of which are affected by objects in the world around them. Life for a Sim is the pursuit of happiness, but happiness depends on social interaction and consumption, and consumption requires money. For example, the cheapest bed in The Sims 2, which costs three hundred “simoleons,” brings your Sim one point of comfort and two points of energy; a three-thousand-simoleon bed carries seven points of comfort and six of energy. Wright has said that he intended the game as a parody of consumerism, because “if you sit there and build a big mansion that’s all full of stuff, without cheating, you realize that all these objects end up sucking up all your time, when they had been promising to save you time.”

Almost no dedicated Sims player, Wright included, actually follows the rules of the game, which force you to spend many hours working in menial jobs in order to be able to afford nicer stuff. Most players use the “cheats” that are widely available on the Internet and have been built into the game by the programmers. Cheats are short pieces of code you can type into the game that let you get around the rules. Typing “motherlode” into The Sims 2, for example, endows your Sims with fifty thousand simoleons. But using cheats doesn’t really feel like cheating, because playing The Sims doesn’t really feel like a game. It seems more like gardening, or fixing up your house. One of the game’s small triumphs is to make work seem like fun. As my fourteen-year-old niece exclaimed recently, when I asked her what she liked about playing The Sims, “You’ve got one Sim who you’ve got to get to school, and another who needs to get to his job, and their kid has been up all night and is in a bad mood, and the house is dirty—I mean, there’s a ton of things to do!”

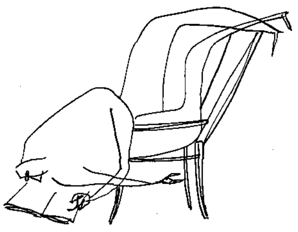
When Wright took his idea to the Maxis board of directors, Jeff Braun says, “The board looked at The Sims and said, ‘What is this? He wants to do an interactive doll house? The guy is out of his mind.’ ” Doll houses were for girls, and girls didn’t play video games. Maxis gave little support or financing for the game. Electronic Arts, which bought Maxis in 1997, was more enthusiastic. (Wright received seventeen million dollars in E.A. stock for his share of the company.) Wright’s games are so different from E.A.’s other releases that it was hard to imagine the two being united in the same enterprise. But the success of SimCity had already established Sim as a strong brand, and E.A., which by then, fifteen years after its founding, was becoming a Procter & Gamble-style brand-management company, foresaw the possibility of building a Sim franchise. Released in 2000, The Sims was an immediate hit; it went on to become the best-selling P.C. game of all time. E.A. has since licensed it to many other playing platforms, and issues regular Sims "expansion packs," featuring new content, like Livin' Large, House Party, and Hot Date. (Wright worked on The Sims 2, which was a major redesign, but he has had nothing to do with the expansion packs.) The Sims franchise has earned E.A. more than a billion dollars so far. E.A.'s only misstep was The Sims Online, the multiplayer version released in 2002, which failed to attract the masses of players drawn to other multiplayer games, such as World of Warcraft and Runescape.

The Sims brought a huge new population to gaming—girls. That did not come as a complete surprise to Wright, since women made up forty per cent of his Sims development team, and his daughter Cassidy, then fourteen years old, had helped him tinker with the prototypes. When he was a kid, Wright told me, "I never played with dolls, which is more of a social thing than playing with trains—it's about the people in the house. Cassidy helped me see that. She and her friends got into the purely creative side of the game, rather than the goal-oriented side, which really influenced me a lot." Cassidy was traumatized to discover that the Sims could burn down their house, and die in the fire, if they weren't careful around the stove. Wright left that feature in the game.

An unintended result of The Sims' success is that Wright transformed the tactile experience of playing with dolls, which has been a part of children's development for thousands of years, into a virtual experience. The enormous success of The Sims means that children today can grow up without having the hands-on model-making experiences that Wright enjoyed as a child, and that inspired him to make games in the first place.

One evening, I went with Wright to the house he and Jones moved into after the Oakland Hills fire. He drove a black two-door BMW with a fancy radar detector. The car was a mess, inside and out; Wright never washes it, because he wants it to look like one of the banged-up starships in "Star Wars." Parking it in the garage, he led me into the house through a short hallway that was full of oddly shaped pieces of machined steel. Wright explained that these were left over from the days when he competed in gladiatorial robot contests called BattleBots, in which engineers attempt to build the most destructive remote-control robot vehicles possible. These ferocious machines fight in large Plexiglas boxes, ramming into each other at high speeds, trying to disable their opponents by flipping them over; the tournaments are like geek cockfights. One of Wright's robots, which he designed with the help of Cassidy, was called Kitty Puff Puff. It fought its opponents (which had names like the Eviscerator and Death Machine) by sticking a piece of gauze to its opponent's armature, and then driving in circles around it, until the opposing robot was so cocooned in gauze that it couldn't move. Eventually, the organizers banned cocooning.

The house, a split-level, was on a hilltop in Orinda, and it had a lovely view of Mt. Diablo in the distance. Jones's paintings—colorful, biomorphic abstractions—were hung on the walls, and in the yard were her sculptures: architectural-looking objects made of found metal. But Wright's stuff took up most of the space. Just inside the front door was the control console of a Soyuz 23 spacecraft, from the nineteen-seventies, which Wright bought from a former State Department official. Upstairs was his collection of unusual insects. Cassidy was away at college, but her prints—whimsical collages that feature drawings of rabbits and electric sockets—were also on display, and I saw a comic book she made, "The Adventures of Not Asian Girl." On a porch off the living room were large blocks of alabaster that Wright was in the process of sculpting with hand tools into smooth, Brancusi-like shapes, a hobby that Jones had suggested to her husband as a way of expressing his artistic side. The rock dust and overflowing ashtrays on the porch suggested that he had been devoting a considerable amount of time to grinding stone lately.



The house was also filled with books. Some are what Wright calls "landmarks"—foundations for the design of one or another of his games. "Most of the games I've done were inspired by books," he told me. SimEarth, a simulation of the earth's ecology, was based on the Gaia hypothesis of James Lovelock, and SimAnt, an ant-colony simulation, was based on E. O. Wilson's "The Ants." The key landmarks for Spore, however, were not books. They were Drake's equation and "The Powers of Ten." The former, which he'd shown me on the computer screen in his office, is a formula devised in 1961 by Frank Drake, a radio astronomer, to estimate the number of possible worlds in our galaxy that might be populated with beings that could communicate with us. (About ten thousand, according to Drake's calculations.) The latter is a short film by Charles and Ray Eames, made in 1977, which begins with a man lying on the grass in a Chicago park, and then shows a series of images of the same shot, each taken from a position ten times farther away than the last one, until the viewer reaches the limits of the universe at 10^{24} meters (ten to the twenty-fourth power). Then it returns to the opening image and goes the other way, zooming into the man's skin, until at 10^{-16} you reach the limits of the inner world—the space inside a proton.

"I love 'The Powers of Ten,'" Wright said, "and I've always been a big fan of the Eameses. At the same time, I am really interested in the terms of Drake's equation, and when I began working on Spore I was using it to map some of the game play. At some point I realized that the terms of Drake's equation mapped neatly to the scale of 'The Powers of Ten.' So I rolled the two up into Spore."

Wright seems to be more interested in making games than he is in integrating his ideas into a coherent philosophy. After you have played The Sims long enough, for example, you begin to recognize all the ways in which the simulation is not like real life. (The Sims 2, which came out in 2004, added more refinements to the basic design; in addition to the motives and needs, there are four different aspirations.) The Sims is only as realistic as the social theories it's based on, and these theories have been combined not according to scientific principles but for the purposes of entertainment. The Sims doesn't really model human dynamics; it merely gives you a model for exploring your own idea about how families work (just as playing with dolls does). Wright is not a visionary, in the sense that he is not the author of a world view; he tailors his ideas according to the technical parameters of the simulation and the logic of games. Whether the game involves fighting intergalactic battles or modelling climate change, the simulation works according to a logic of its own. Wright may be the game industry's greatest auteur, but to a large extent he has abdicated authorship of his own creation.

Jones came home with some Mexican takeout, and we ate from the containers, in the living room. Jones is soft-spoken, but she had a quiet authority around the house. She seemed a bit subdued. I asked her if she played her husband's games. "No, I don't. I'm not really interested in games," she said pleasantly. Later, she added, "Our daughter Cass used to say, 'We lived through the process of making the games, so we don't need to play them.' I think it frustrates Will that I don't play his games. Clearly, his games matter, on a deep level, to many people—take these online diaries people keep about their Sims. Wow. I don't know if they're avoiding their lives or learning about them. Me, I don't want to play a game to learn about myself." Several months later, when I heard that Wright and Jones were thinking about separating, and Wright had moved out, I recalled Jones's words.

I asked Wright if he was working on a new game. He said that, for the first time in his career, he was not. He was researching the Soviet space program, and hoping to produce a documentary film about it. He said he was seriously considering a return to rally racing this November by competing in the Baja 1000—a race across the desert. (He later changed his mind.) He has a Hollywood agent and a TV development deal with ABC for a reality show exploring our relationship with technology in the home. But tonight, at least, he did not seem particularly engaged by any of these plans. With the prospect of Spore's launch ahead of him, he seemed a little lost.

In May, I joined some twenty thousand members of the game industry—developers, marketers, distributors, buyers, press—in downtown Los Angeles for the industry's big trade show, Electronic Entertainment Expo, or E3. Electronic Arts, which had hoped in vain that Wright would have the game ready for the convention, was instead offering conventioneers the opportunity to see Wright demonstrate the game, inside a special Spore Hut that was set up next to E.A.'s enormous pavilion.

By Wednesday morning at ten o'clock, when the trade floor opened, Wright was installed inside the hut, which could accommodate about thirty people. The line to get into the Spore Hut quickly grew to two hours long, snaking through the trade floor. Wright's mission was to play all the way through the game, which he estimates would require seventy-nine years, if one played every aspect of it (Wright is designing cheats), in seventeen to twenty minutes, over and over, for two days.

On the trade floor, screens showed guns, cars, football players, and lycra-clad virtual babes, featuring "better breast shadowing, better breast physics, and deeper breast customization," as one gaming blog put it. It felt as if we were all inside some gigantic video-game machine—the place Nolan Bushnell had imagined thirty-five years earlier.

In the E.A. pavilion, I joined a clump of gamers watching each other play Battlefield 2142, the latest sequel to E.A.'s popular shooter. I took a turn, but kept breaking out in a sweat and being greeted with the alarming sight of my face reflected on the screen—scrunched up, red, demonic-looking. Staggering out of the E.A. pavilion and into the cyber midway, I tried some of the nonviolent games, including Guitar Hero, in which the designers have ingeniously turned the controller into a guitar that you play by pushing buttons; it's like karaoke air guitar. I also tried SingStar Rocks!, a PlayStation game which measures your pitch, phrasing, and timing, and scores you as you sing. (Unfortunately, I chose Nirvana's "Come as You Are," which is not an easy song, and then compounded my problems by trying to sing in Kurt Cobain's register. "Awful" was the game's judgment of my performance, and it bothered me all day.) Finally, I got a demo of Left Behind, which is a Christian-themed video game based on the popular series of books by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. You play a Christian in the streets of post-apocalyptic Manhattan, and the object is to convert as many nonbelievers as you can before the Judgment Day. You get power-ups for finding bits of Scripture, and praying raises your spirit level—which is represented by a graphic "slider" at the top of the screen. However, you have to kill hostile nonbelievers, and can acquire some suitable weaponry for the job. Violence drains your spirit level, but if you click on the pray button you can bring it up again.

The influence of Will Wright was not immediately obvious on the trade floor. His sandbox aesthetic is more noticeable in online virtual communities like Second Life, created by Linden Lab, and based in San Francisco, which uses a similar operating system to The Sims Online. Second Lifers can buy space in a SimCity-like community, and use it for commercial transactions—conducted in virtual currency that can be exchanged for real money out in the real world. Aspiring musicians can perform onstage while their music is streamed over an audio channel. Second Life seems like a logical outcome of Wright's simulation games—and it isn't technically a game at all. When I asked Wright about Second Life, he said, "I think what you're going to see now on Second Life is people who will start to develop games—someone will invite other people to kick a soccer ball around, and it will go from there."

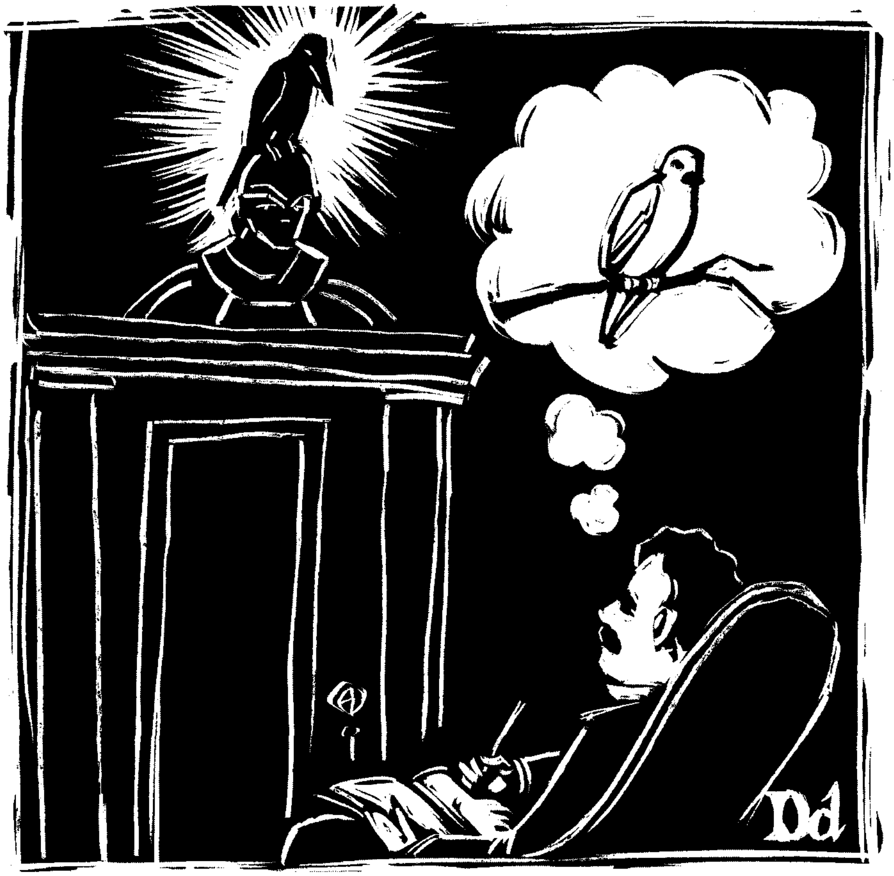
Wright's situation inside the hut was a little like his situation in the game industry—he seemed both enthroned and imprisoned. I half expected to find Bushnell at the door, charging people a quarter to see the geek. I could dimly make out Wright, seated behind a raft of computers on a raised platform behind the chairs, smears of color from the monitors reflecting on his glasses. There was a large screen on one wall, where the game was projected. He had been demonstrating Spore for about five hours straight when I got there, without lunch or cigarette breaks, although the E.A. handlers had brought him a Mocha Frappuccino, his favorite drink, from Starbucks.

I took my seat. There were little holes in the ceiling, with light behind them, to simulate stars. The walls of the hut were decorated with models of creatures that other players had designed. The lights went down and the game began in the drop of water. "O.K., so we start, and I'm trying to survive here—whoops the guy wants to eat me." Wright narrated the game in the first person, and he seemed to be having fun. Using the creature editor, he put together a part-reptilian, part-avian creature, with yellow and purple stripes, four spindly legs, and talons at the end of its arms; it looked both cute and fierce. "O.K., now I have to survive and eat—whoops, I'm going to run away from that guy. Whoops, not that way—this is a harsh world right now." His creature ate another creature's egg. "O.K., now that I've eaten I feel like mating," and he located a mate the computer had generated for him. The creatures went at it, discreetly, behind a puff of smoke, to the sound of smooth jazz. "Procedurally generated mating," Wright said, with a smoker's chuckle.

Wright hurtled through the levels, evolution moving at hyperspeed as his creature acquired houses, tools, weapons, vehicles, and cities. While he was narrating his creature's adventures, Wright was also explaining how, in passing through the different levels of the game, the player would be progressing through the history of video games: from the arcade games, like Pac-Man, to Miyamoto's Super Mario, to the first-person shooters. At the tribal level you are playing a Peter Molyneux-style God game, and at the global level you are playing Sid Meier's Civilization. Finally, Wright reached the status of intergalactic god, with the power to visit other worlds. "Now we're going to go over to this place, which you can tell by the sliders has intelligent life on it, and this is actually a moon, a moon of this gas giant here. O.K., this is an alien civilization and there are a lot of different things I can do here diplomatically—I can actually use fireworks. O.K., they seem to like that. Actually, now they're starting to worship me as a god. So I might decide to pick one of these guys up." A tractor beam came down from his spaceship and sucked up one of the creatures. The natives started shooting at him. "Oops. They were upset by that."

At a certain point in the performance, the crazy ambition of Spore became clear: Wright was proposing to simulate the limitless possibility of life itself. The simulation falls between Darwinism and intelligent design, into new conceptual territory. Wright had worked out the algorithm for life, as described by the philosopher Daniel C. Dennett, in "Darwin's Dangerous Idea." Dennett writes, "Here, then, is Darwin's dangerous idea: the algorithmic level is the level that best accounts for the speed of the antelope, the wing of the eagle, the shape of the orchid, the diversity of species, and all the other occasions for wonder in the world of nature. . . . Can it really be the outcome of nothing but a cascade of algorithmic processes feeding on chance?" The old dream of the M.I.T. hackers who came up with Spacewar—to recreate life on a computer—was coming true forty years later, right here in the Spore Hut, in the form of a spindly, striped creature that looked a little like Will Wright himself.

After Wright's encounter with the other planet, he pulled back to reveal a vast galaxy of other worlds, some computer generated, some created by other players in the game who had reached the status of intergalactic gods—"more worlds than any player could visit in his lifetime," he said. As people in the audience gasped at the vastness of the possibility space, Wright's spaceship zoomed into the interstellar sandbox, looking for an uninhabited planet to colonize, just as young Will had promised his father he would. ♦



EDGAR ALLAN PROZAC

FICTION

PAPER LOSSES

BY LORRIE MOORE

Although Kit and Rafe had met in the peace movement, marching, organizing, making no-nukes signs, now they wanted to kill each other. They had become, also, a little pro-nuke. Married for two decades of precious, precious life, she and Rafe seemed currently to be partners only in anger and dislike, their old, lusty love mutated to rage. It was both their shame and demise that hate (like love) could not live on air. And so in this, their newly successful project together, they were complicitous and synergistic. They were nurturing, homeopathic, and enabling. They spawned and raised their hate together, cardiovascularly, spiritually, organically. In tandem, as a system, as a dance team of bad feeling, they had shoved their hate center stage and shone a spotlight down for it to seize. *Do your stuff, baby! Who is the best? Who's the man?*

"Pro-nuke? You are? Really?" Kit was asked by her friends, to whom she continued, indiscreetly, to complain.

"Well, no." Kit sighed. "But in a way."

"Seems like you need someone to talk to."

Which hurt Kit's feelings, since she'd felt that she was talking to *them*. "I'm simply concerned about the kids," she said.

Rafe had changed. His smile was just a careless yawn, or was his smile just stuck carelessly on? Which was the correct lyric? She didn't know. But, for sure, he had changed. In Beersboro, one put things neutrally, like that. Such changes were couched. No one ever said that a man was now completely fucked-up. They said, "The guy has changed." Rafe had started to make model rockets in the basement. He'd become *a little different*. He was something of a *character*. The brazen might suggest, "He's gotten into some weird shit." The rockets were tall, plastic, penile-shaped things to which Rafe carefully shellacked authenticating military decals. What had happened to the handsome hippie she'd married? He was prickly and remote, empty with fury. A blankness had entered his blue-green eyes. They stayed wide and bright but nonfunctional, like dime-store jewelry. She wondered if this was a nervous breakdown, the genuine article. But it persisted for months, and she began to suspect, instead, a brain tumor. Occasionally, he catcalled and wolf-whistled across his mute alienation, his pantomime of hate momentarily collapsed. "Hey, cutie," he'd call to her from the stairs, after not having looked her in the eye for two months. It was like being snowbound with someone's demented uncle: should marriage be like that? She wasn't sure.

She seldom saw him anymore when he got up in the morning and rushed off to his office. And when he came home from work he'd disappear down the basement stairs. Nightly, in the anxious conjugal dusk that was now their only life together, after the kids had gone to bed, the house would fill up with fumes. When she called down to him about this, he never answered. He seemed to have turned into some sort of space alien. Of course, later she would understand that all this meant that he was involved with another woman, but at the time, protecting her own vanity and sanity, she was working with two hypotheses only: brain tumor or space alien.

"All husbands are space aliens," her friend Jan said on the phone.

"God help me, I had no idea." Kit began spreading peanut butter on a pretzel and eating quickly. "He's in such disconnect. His judgment is so bad."

"Not on the planet he lives on. On his planet, he's a veritable Solomon. 'Bring the stinkin' baby to me now!'"

"Do you think people can be rehabilitated and forgiven?"

"Sure! Look at Ollie North."

"He lost that Senate race. He was not sufficiently forgiven."

"But he got some votes."

"Yeah, and now what is he doing?"

"Now he's promoting a line of fire-retardant pajamas. It's a life!" She paused. "Do you fight about it?"

"About what?" Kit asked.

"The rockets back to his homeland."

Kit sighed again. "Yes, the toxic military-crafts business poisoning our living space. Do I fight? I don't fight, I just, well, O.K.—I ask a few questions from time to time. I ask, 'What the hell are you doing?' I ask, 'Are you trying to asphyxiate your entire family?' I ask, 'Did you hear me?' Then I ask, 'Did you hear me?' again. Then I ask, 'Are you deaf?' I also ask, 'What do you think a marriage is? I'm really just curious to know,' and also, 'Is this your idea of a well-ventilated place?' A simple interview, really. I don't believe in fighting. I believe in giving peace a chance. I also believe in internal bleeding." She paused to shift the phone more comfortably against her face. "I'm also interested," Kit said, "in those forensically undetectable dissolving plastic bullets. Have you heard of those?"

"No."

"Well, maybe I'm wrong about those. I'm probably wrong. That's where the Mysterious Car Crash may have to come in."

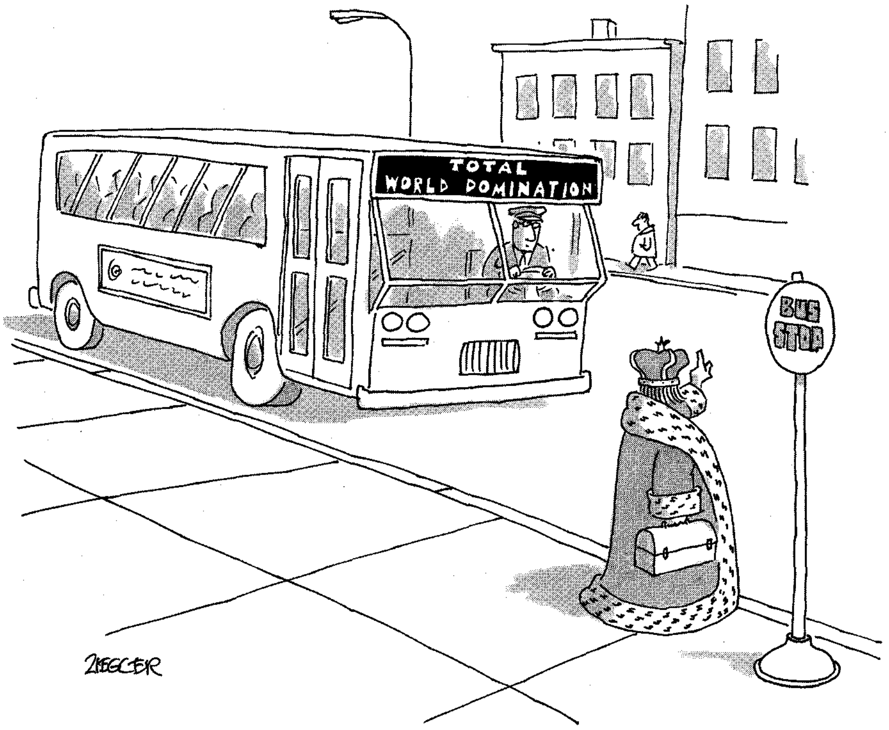
In the chrome of the refrigerator she caught the reflection of her own face, part brunette Shelley Winters, part potato, the finely etched sharps and accidentals beneath her eyes a musical interlude amid the bloat. In every movie she had seen with Shelley Winters in it, Shelley Winters was the one who died.

Peanut butter was stuck high and dry on Kit's gums. On the counter, a large old watermelon had begun to sag and pull apart in the middle along the curve of seeds, like a shark's grin, and she lopped off a wedge, rubbed its cool point around the inside of her mouth. It had been a year since Rafe kissed her. She sort of cared and sort of didn't. A woman had to choose her own particular unhappiness carefully. That was the only happiness in life: choosing the best unhappiness. An unwise move and, good God, you could squander everything.

The summons took her by surprise. It came in the mail, addressed to her, and there it was, stapled to divorce papers. She'd been properly served. The bitch had been papered. Like a person, a marriage was unrecognizable in death, even when buried in its favorite suit. Atop the papers themselves was a letter from Rafe suggesting their spring wedding anniversary as the final divorce date. "Why not complete the symmetry?" he wrote, which didn't even sound like him, though its heartless efficiency was suited to this, his new life as a space alien, and generally in keeping with the principles of space-alien culture.

The papers referred to Kit and Rafe by their legal names, Katherine and Raphael, as if the more formal versions of them were the ones who were divorcing—their birth certificates were divorcing!—and not they themselves.

DETAIL: TIERNEY GEARON, "UNTITLED" (1999)/YOSSI MILO GALLERY



Rafe was still living in the house and had not yet told her that he'd bought a new one. "Honey," she said, trembling, "something very interesting came in the mail today."

Rage had its medicinal purposes, but she was not wired to sustain it, and when it tumbled away loneliness engulfed her, grief burning at the center with a cold blue heat. At the funerals of two different elderly people she hardly knew, she wept in the back row of the church like a secret lover of the deceased. She felt woozy and ill and never wanted to see Rafe—or, rather, Raphael—again, but they had promised the kids this Caribbean vacation; it was already booked, so what could they do?

This, at last, was what all those high-school drama classes had been for: acting. She had once played the queen in "A Winter's Tale," and once a changeling child in a play called "Love Me Right Now," written by one of the more disturbing English teachers in her high school. In both of these performances, she had learned that time was essentially a comic thing—only constraints upon it diverted it to tragedy, or, at least, to misery. Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde—if only they'd had more time! Marriage stopped being comic when it was suddenly halted, at which point it became divorce, which time never disturbed and the funniness of which was never-ending.

Still, Rafe mustered up thirty seconds of utterance in an effort to persuade her not to join him and the children on this vacation. "I don't think you should go," he announced.

"I'm going," she said.

"We'll be giving the children false hope."

"Hope is never false. Or it's always false. Whatever. It's just hope," she said. "Nothing wrong with that."

"I just don't think you should go."

Divorce, she could see, would be like marriage: a power grab. Who would be the dog and who would be the owner of the dog?

At this point, however, she and Rafe had not yet signed the papers. And there was still the matter of her wedding ring, which was studded with little junk emeralds and which she liked a lot and hoped she could continue wearing because it didn't look like a typical wedding ring. He had removed his ring—which did look like a typical wedding ring—a year before, because, he said, "it bothered him." She had thought at the time that he'd meant it was rubbing. She had not been deeply alarmed; he had often shed his clothes spontaneously—when they first met, he'd been something of a nudist. It was good to date a nudist: things moved right along. But it was not good trying to stay married to one. Soon she would be going on chaste geriatric dates with other people whose clothes would, like hers, remain glued to the body.

"What if I can't get my ring off?" she said to him now on the plane. She had gained a little weight during their twenty years of marriage, but really not all that much. She had been practically a child bride!

"Send me the sawyer's bill," he said. Oh, the sparkle in his eye *was* gone!

"What is wrong with you?" she said. Of course, she blamed his parents, who had somehow, long ago, accidentally or on purpose, raised him as a space alien, with space-alien values, space-alien thoughts, and the hollow, shifty character, concocted guilelessness, and sociopathic secrets of a space alien.

"What is wrong with *you?*" he snarled. This was his habit, his space-alien habit, of merely repeating what she had just said to him. It had to do, no doubt, with his central nervous system, a silicon-chipped information processor incessantly encountering new linguistic combinations, which it then had to absorb and file. Repetition bought time and assisted the storage process.

She was less worried about the girls, who were just little, than she was about Sam, her sensitive fourth grader, who now sat across the airplane aisle, moodily staring out the window at the clouds. Soon, through the machinations of the state's extremely progressive divorce laws—a boy needs his dad!—she would no longer see him every day; he would become a boy who no longer saw his mother every day, and he would scuttle a little and float off and away like paper carried by wind. With time, he would harden: he would eye her over his glasses, in the manner of a maître d' suspecting riffraff. He would see her coming the way a panicked party guest sees someone without a nametag. But on this, their last trip as an actual family, he did fairly well at not letting on.

They all slept in the same room, in separate beds, and saw other families squalling and squabbling, so that by comparison theirs—a family about to

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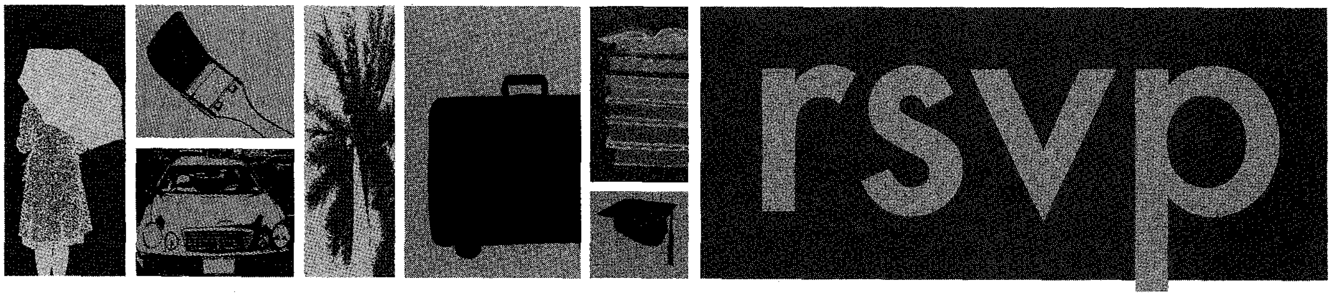

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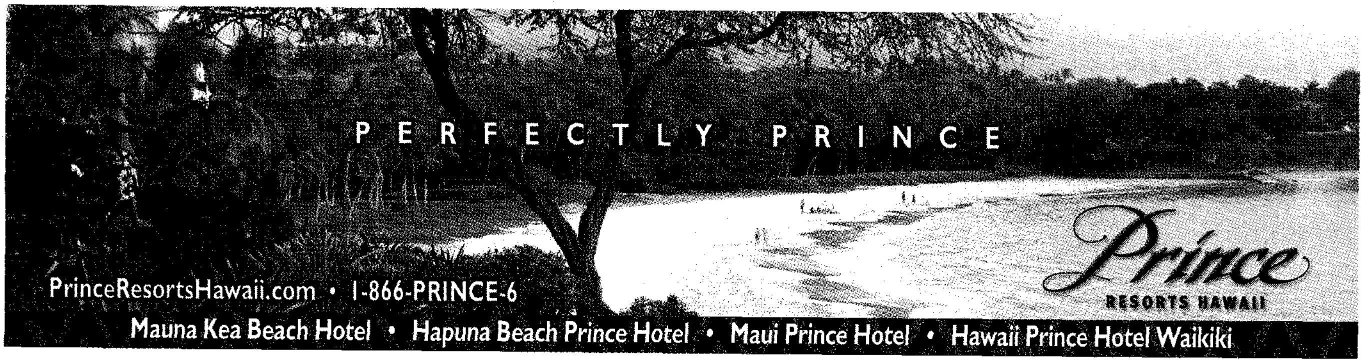
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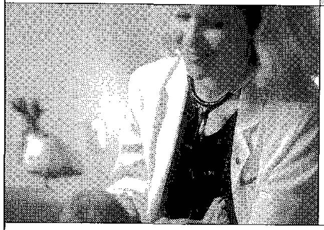

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break apart forever—didn't look so bad. She was not deceived by the equatorial sea breeze and so did not overbake herself in the colonial sun; with the resort managers, she shared her moral outrage at the armed guards who kept the local boys from sneaking past the fence onto this white, white beach; and she rubbed a kind of resin into her brow to freeze it and downplay the creases—to make her appear younger for her departing husband, though he never once glanced at her. Not that she looked that good: her suitcase had got lost and she was forced to wear clothes purchased from the gift shop—the words "La Caribe" emblazoned across every single thing.

On the beach, people read books about Rwandan and Yugoslavian genocide. This was to add seriousness to a trip that lacked it. One was supposed not to notice the dark island boys on the other side of the barbed wire, throwing rocks.

There were ways of making things vanish temporarily. One could disappear oneself, in movement and repetition.

Sam liked only the trampoline and nothing else. There were dolphin rides, but he sensed their cruelty. "They speak a language," he said. "We shouldn't ride them."

"They *look* happy," Kit said.

Sam studied her with a seriousness from some sweet beyond. "They look happy so you won't kill them."

"You think so?"

"If dolphins tasted good," he said, "we wouldn't even know about their language." That the intelligence in a thing could undermine your appetite for it. That yumminess obscured the mind of the yummy as well as the mind of the yummer. That deliciousness resulted in decapitation. That you could understand something only if you did not desire it. How did he know such things already? Usually girls knew them first. But not hers. Her girls, Beth and Dale, were tough beyond her comprehension: practical, self-indulgent, independent five-year-old twins, a system unto themselves. They had their own secret world of Montessori code words and plastic jewelry and spells of hilarity brought on mostly by the phrase "cinnamon M&M's" repeated six times, fast. They wore sparkly fairy wings wherever they went, even over cardigans, and they carried wands. "I'm a big brother now," Sam had said repeatedly to everyone and with uncertain pride the day the girls were born, and after that he spoke not another word on the matter. Sometimes Kit accidentally referred to Beth and Dale as Death and Bale, as they, for instance, buried their several Barbies in sand, then lifted them out again with glee. A woman on a towel, reading of genocide, turned and smiled. In this fine compound on the sea, the contradictions of life were grotesque and uninventable.

Kit went to the central office and signed up for a hot-stone massage. "Would you like a man or a woman?" the receptionist asked.

"Excuse me?" Kit said, stalling. After all these years of marriage, which *did* she want? What did she know of men—or women? "There's no such thing as 'men,'" Jan used to say. "Every man is different. The only thing they have in common is, well, a capacity for horrifying violence."

"A man or a woman—for the massage?" Kit asked. She thought of the slow mating of snails, hermaphrodites for whom it was all so confusing: by the time they had figured out who was going to be the girl and who was going to be the boy, someone came along with some garlic paste and just swooped them right up.

"Oh, either one," she said, and then knew she'd get a man.

Whom she tried not to look at but could smell in all his smoky aromas—tobacco, incense, cannabis—swirling their way around him. A wiry old American pothead gone to grim seed. His name was Daniel Handler, according to the business card he wore safety-pinned to his shirt like a badge. He did not speak. He placed hot stones up and down her back and left them there. Did she think her belotioned flesh too private and precious to be touched by the likes of him? *Are you crazy?* The mad joy in her face was held over the floor by the massage-table headpiece, and at his touch her eyes filled with bittersweet tears, which then dripped out of her nose, which she realized was positioned perfectly by God as a little drainpipe for crying. The sad massage-hut carpet beneath her grew a spot. A heart could break, but perhaps you could move on to the next one, and the next, like a worm with its several hearts. Daniel left the hot stones on her until they went cold. As each one lost its heat, she could no longer feel it there on her back, and then its removal was like a discovery that it had been there all along: how strange to forget and then feel something only then, at the end. Though this wasn't the same thing as the frog in the pot whose water slowly heats and boils, still it had meaning, she felt, the way metaphors of a thermal nature tended to. Then he took all the stones off and pressed the hard edges of them deep into her back, between the bones, in a way that felt mean but more likely had no intention at all.

"That was nice," she said, as he was putting all his stones away. He had heated them in a plastic electric Crock-pot filled with water, and now he unplugged the thing in a tired fashion.

"Where did you get those stones?" she asked. They were smooth and dark gray—black when wet, she saw.

"They're river stones," he said. "I've been collecting them for years up in Colorado." He placed them in a metal fishing-tackle box.

"You live in Colorado?" she asked.

"Used to," he said, and that was that.

On the last night of their vacation, her suitcase arrived like a joke. She didn't even open it. Sam put out the little doorknob flag that said "WAKE US UP FOR THE SEA TURTLES." The flag had a pre-printed request for a 3 A.M. wakeup call so that they could go to the beach and see the hatching of the baby sea turtles and their quick scuttle into the ocean, under the cover of night, to avoid predators. But though Sam had hung the flag carefully, and before the midnight deadline, no staff person woke them. And by the time they got up and went down to the beach it was ten in the morning. Strangely, the sea turtles were still there. They had hatched during the night and then hotel personnel had hung on to them, in a baskety cage, to show them off to the tourists who were too lazy or deaf to have got up in the night.

"Look, come see!" a man with a Spanish accent who usually rented the scuba gear said. Sam, Beth, Dale, and Kit all ran over. (Rafe had stayed behind to drink coffee and read the paper.) The squirming babies were beginning to heat up in the sun; the goldening Venetian vellum of their wee webbed feet was already edged in desiccating brown. "I'm going to have to let them go now," the man said. "You are the last ones to see these little *bebés*." He took them over to the water's edge and let them go, hours too late, to make their own way into the sea. And that's when a frigate bird swooped in, plucked them, one by one, from the silver waves, and ate them for breakfast.

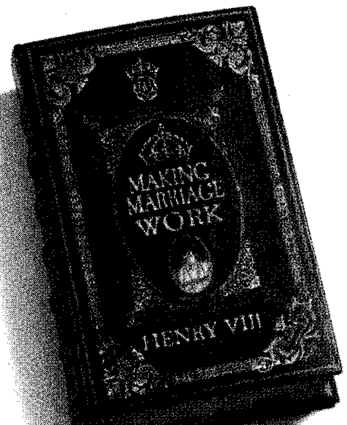
Kit sank down in a large chair next to Rafe. He was tanning himself, she could see, for someone else's lust. His every posture contained a strut. What bimbo had he wanted to give her ticket to? (Only later would she find out. "As a feminist, you mustn't blame the other woman," a neighbor would tell her. "As a feminist, I request that you no longer speak to me," Kit would reply.)

"I think I need a drink," she said. The kids were swimming.

"Don't expect me to buy you a drink," he said.

Had she even asked? Did she now call him the bitterest name she could think of? Did she stand and turn and slap him across the face in front of several passersby? Who told you *that*?

When they finally left La Caribe, she was glad. Staying there, she had begun to hate the world. In the airports and on the planes home, she did not even try to act natural: natural was a felony. She spoke to her children calmly, from a script, with dialogue and stage directions of utter neutrality. Back home in Beersboro, she unpacked the condoms and candles, her little love sack, completely unused, and threw it in the trash. What had she been thinking? Later, when she had learned to tell this story differently, as a story, she would construct a final lovemaking scene of sentimental vengeance that would contain the inviolable center of their love, the sweet animal safety of night after night, the still-beating tender heart of marriage. But, for now, she would become like her unruinable daughters, and even her son, who, as he aged stoically and carried on in bottomless forgetting, would come to scarcely recall—was it even past imagining?—that she and Rafe had ever been together at all. ♦



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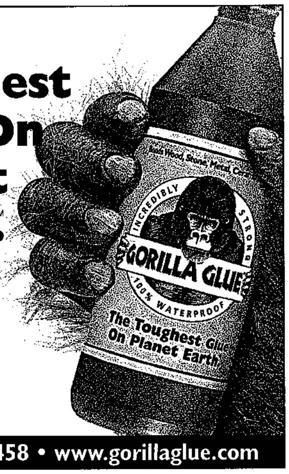

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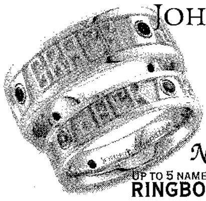

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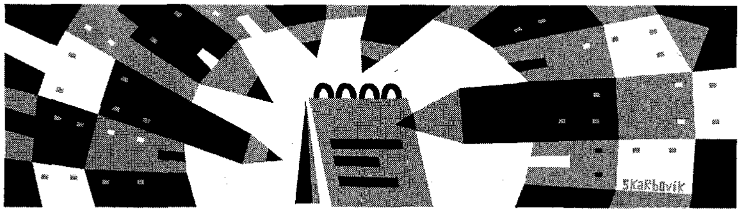


THE CURRENT CINEMA

IN YOUR FACE

"Borat" and "Volver."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Who is Sacha Baron Cohen? We know that he is British, that he is Jewish, and that he studied history at Cambridge, where his cousin Simon is a professor of developmental psychopathology. Sacha has entered a no less delicate field. He is a squirmist: a master of SECS, or Socio-Ethnophobic Comic Simulations, in which he adopts fictional personae and then marches briskly into the real world with a mission to embarrass its inhabitants. His first coup was the invention of Ali G, a would-be rapper from the London suburbs, who inveigled celebrities—first in England, then in America—to trip themselves up on camera. He realized that, under the rules of international tolerance, they could not be seen to ignore the earnest entreaties of a young man in a gold tracksuit and wraparound shades. The definition of a clever stunt is one that tempts no less a personage than Noam Chomsky (or, as Ali G calls him, "my main man Professor Norman Chomsky") to join the ranks of stooges—remaining thoughtful as the sexually bullish Ali inquires of him, "How would you like it if I called you bilingual?"

Next up, and more addictive still, was Borat Sagdiyev, the bony and wire-haired journalist from Kazakhstan. Unlike Ali G, who found only a televised niche, Borat is, as he would boast, becoming huge. Uncontainable on TV, he has swelled into cinemas, his wooing of America aided by the simple trick of filming him *in* America—on a coast-to-coast pilgrimage, with Pamela Anderson as his Holy Grail. The resulting film is titled "Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan," and it purports to be a documentary showing Borat lurching gaily from one instructive fiasco to the next. These include a driving lesson, a meeting of veteran feminists ("I could not concentrate on what this old man was saying," he complains of one woman), a babble-tongued Pentecostal service, and a demure Southern dinner, at which one of the guests claims that, with a little training, Borat could be "Americanized." Fat chance.

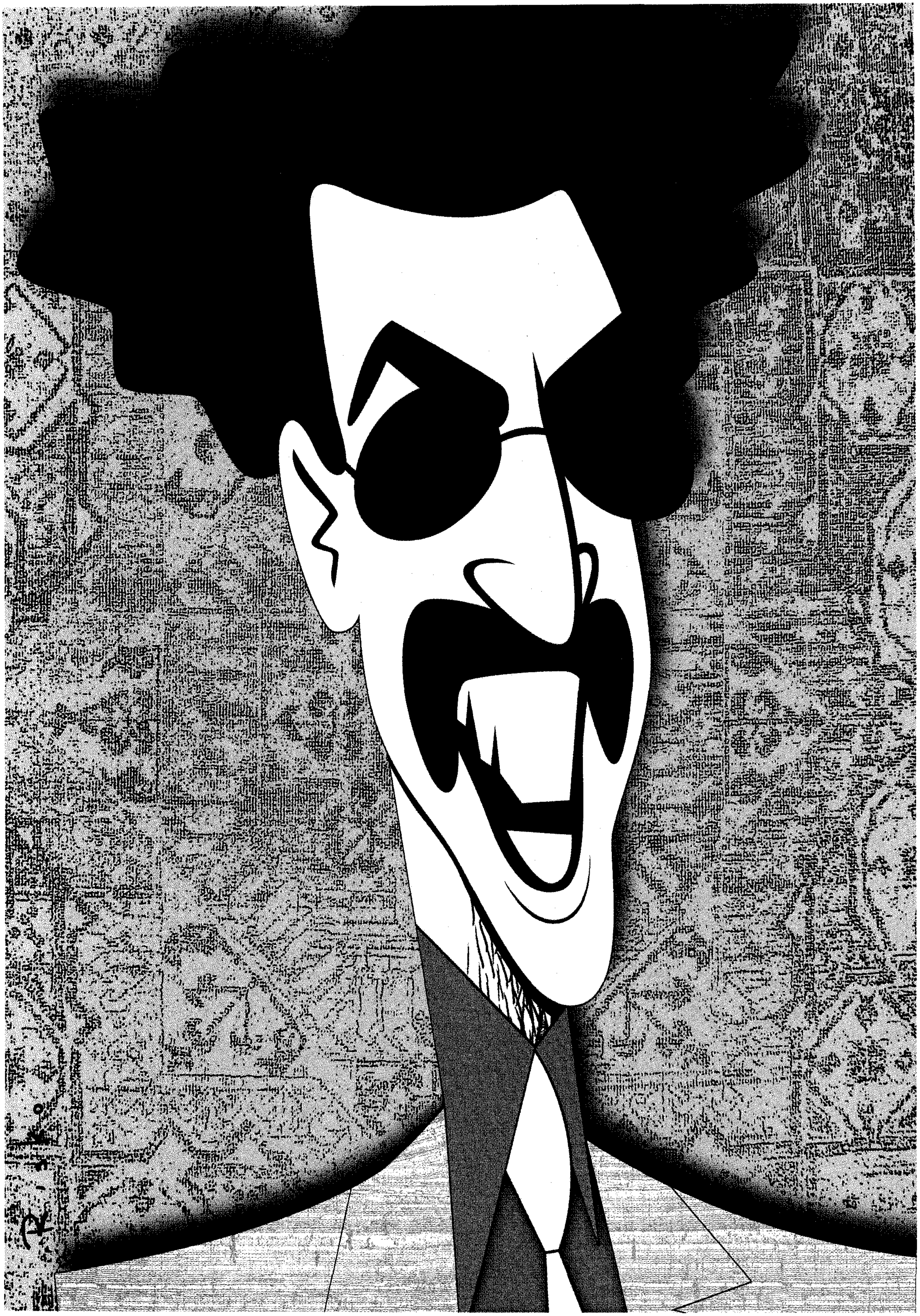
"Borat" is in part a feat of smuggling. The accepted view is that the Ali G phenomenon was bent on lampooning the piteous efforts of British white boys to sound and act black, but that was not the whole deal; it was also, at a subtler and less mentionable level, mocking some of the extremes of black culture itself. And so it is with Borat. On the one hand, he invites us to feel superior to the crudities of the Old World, as when he arrives in New York, mistakes the elevator for his hotel room, and pronounces himself quite happy with the accommodations. On the other hand, he sneaks in a volley of low blows against the America he claims to revere. Gasp as he incites a rodeo crowd to applaud his plan that President Bush should "drink the blood of every single man, woman, and child" in Iraq! Shudder as he boozes with a batch of true-life college boys, who share with him their modest thoughts on women!

This defense of Borat as an unwitting scourge of the reactionary—unearthing Midwestern beliefs no less parochial than those he left behind in Kazakhstan—is sound as far as it goes. But the movie goes further. It is equipped, like an F-15 Eagle, to engage multiple targets at once. If you can't bear to hear Alan Keyes—whom Borat interviews, and who, like most of the participants, has no idea what he is dealing with—described as a "genuine chocolate-face," then for pity's sake stay home. As for the scene in which Borat smooches a blond woman before introducing her as his sister, the "number-four prostitute in all of Kazakhstan," it is, like most of the film's lavatorial gags, both daring you to gawk and forcing you to look away. What does Baron Cohen's cousin, an expert in autism, make of all the retard jokes? And what game is Baron Cohen playing, exactly, when he shows mock footage of an annual Kazakh ceremony known as "the Running of the Jew," in which children kick a giant egg to bits, to stop "the Jew chick" from being hatched?

Baron Cohen is one of the few British Jews to venture successfully into the comedy of shock. It was somehow both shameful and predictable that when Lenny Bruce was invited to appear in London for the second time, in 1963, he had no chance to perform before he was taken to the airport, deported, and banned from ever disturbing the British peace again. More recently, the case for disturbance has been made by the novelist Howard Jacobson, who has insisted, both within and beyond his books, that comedy is not just enfeebled but put to sleep, like an unwanted animal, once it discards its right and duty to offend. That is certainly the spirit of "Borat," which may lack all narrative shapeliness, but which offers comfort neither to Baron Cohen's onscreen victims nor to his audience; it is as if he were outraged by the business of our being human—as if, in laying bare our follies, he were just quickening the process by which we already make fools of ourselves.

So why send his characters here? Because America, to any filmmaker, is where the money is, but also because, to

Sacha Baron Cohen as Borat: quickening the process by which we already make fools of ourselves.



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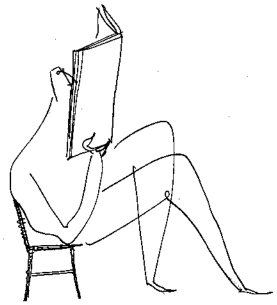
the connoisseur of hurt pride, it is where the sore spots are. When Borat laughs at the notion that you can be *against* cruelty to animals, you can hear, at his back, the snicker of Baron Cohen as he takes his cleaver to another sacred cow. His task is not so much to insult his fellow Jews, or the African-American community, as to register amazement at a culture that turns race relations into an article of faith—that seems to believe, against the run of history, in legislating our lower, more brutish instincts out of existence. In the mind of Sacha Baron Cohen, they are here to stay.

Listen to the kissing. That is my advice to anyone watching the start of "Volver," the new film from Pedro Almodóvar. The director has outgrown his early, or "horny as a bullfighter," period, so the kisses are no longer driven by lust. Instead, we have a gaggle of women, young and old, exchanging pecks on the cheek—the mildest of greetings, except that they sound like rifle shots. Close your eyes and you could be watching "The Wild Bunch."

This small excess proves that Almodóvar is still crazy after all these years. His movies may have calmed down, or grown up, and they are fashioned with more structural nicety than those of any other current director, yet much about them remains not just larger but louder than life. Like Martin Scorsese (or, before him, Michael Powell), Almodóvar has a raging sweet tooth for the color red, which time will never allay. "Volver" is emblazoned with a scarlet reel of fire hose, a mopful of human gore, the slicing of red peppers, and a station wagon that appears to have been spray-painted with tomato soup. When the main character, Raimunda (Penélope Cruz), answers the door to a guy who runs the restaurant next door, he points out a smear of blood on her neck. "Women's troubles," she says. She could be describing the whole film.

The particular trouble besetting Raimunda, and the source of that blood, is the body of her late husband. His name was Paco (Antonio de la Torre), and he was murdered, earlier that night, by their teen-age daughter, Paula (Yohana Cobo), at whose crotch he had been gazing, and on whom he eventually pounced. Instantly, almost proudly, his widow assumes responsibility: "Remember, I killed him," she says to Paula. Whatever else, she will not let her daughter be punished for this high but excusable crime. I liked the moral fierceness here—the snap of Cruz's voice and the glare of her eyes, lined as heavily as Tutankhamen's. Raimunda stashes the corpse in the restaurant's freezer—the owner has gone away—and without any training or experience she takes over the business, casually serving lunchtime feasts for thirty. This being Madrid, the food is largely pig-centric, although we are left to wonder whether she ran short of sausage one day, looked at the freezer, and made do with *Paco a la plancha*.

Raimunda and her sister, Sole (Lola Dueñas), who is as lonely as her name suggests, lost their mother, Irene (Carmen Maura), in a fire some years ago. Now Irene comes back. There were already hints that she was caring for their aunt Paula (Chus Lampreave), who was old and forgetful; now, on the aunt's demise, Irene becomes a free agent once more. Being technically dead should, by rights, obstruct her ability to get the most out of life, but Almodóvar would treat such objections as pedantic. He is a post-Christian director, and "Volver" displays a healthy, no-nonsense approach to the resurrection of the body. Initially, Irene opts for the full-on spectre look, complete with snaky white locks, but soon she sharpens up, gets a trim, and resumes her old, voluble, and flatulent self. The primary task of a Hollywood ghost is to spook, whereas Irene has returned on a more diplomatic errand—to explain, to plead, and, as she tells Raimunda, "to ask you to forgive me." There are ancient sins, it turns out, jammed in the cracks of the past, which require expiation. As usual, they are the sins of the fathers.



"Volver" is as manless a movie as I have seen. There was a time in Almodóvar's career—round about "Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!"—when the young hunk who visits Raimunda's restaurant would have settled the check with a handsome tip, preferably over a hot stove, but this time he goes away unslaked. Raimunda prefers the friendship of a local whore, Regina (María Isabel Díaz), who says that "with your cleavage and my mojitos, we'd make a fortune." Not until late in the story did I realize that Regina *was* a whore, since there is not a client in sight. At one point, Sole meets a gang of silent menfolk outside a house, but they are never glimpsed again. Compare the overhead shots of women, which might have been filmed by a guardian angel: Raimunda's hair and bosom as she scrubs the murder weapon in the sink; or a swarm of women in black, clustered around the mourning Sole, fluttering their fans, against a tessellated floor. Sympathy, style, and order: one sex holds all the dice.

The question is not whether such imbalance is fair—the movies are crammed from week to week with misogyny, which demands a storming response—but to what extent "Volver" is attuned to the real. So much of it wants to feel rough and grounded, like the two women hacking at hard soil with a pickaxe, as they prepare to entomb a man. Yet the film, against my wishes, left me unmoved. There is a lovely scene in which Cruz sings (or lip-synchs) a plaintive ballad, with her tears brimming and the words laying forth the theme of return, but that is just the problem: you feel another cog being added to the film's emotional engine, and something about the construction seems too efficient and pat. The fact that the heroines' feelings are presented as open and raw does not make "Volver" any less of a concoction—a half-camp, half-noble dream of female solidarity, any grains of bitchiness tossed aside like salt. The climactic revelations, concerning which parent did what to which child, are both startling and unsurprising, and you sense that an alternative set of horrors would have made no difference. Almodóvar's point is that the same injustices crop up from one generation to the next (note that the senile aunt and the molested youngster bear the same name, Paula); all that women can do is band together, like Spartans, and fend off the threat. I tried to imagine a policeman entering the stronghold of this movie and seeking to impose the law of the land. He would be set upon, like Actaeon, and torn apart. ♦

BOOKS

SICK CITY

Maps and mortality in the time of cholera.

BY STEVEN SHAPIN

After Katrina, cholera. On August 31, 2005—two days after the hurricane made landfall—the Bush Administration's Health and Human Services Secretary warned, "We are gravely concerned about the potential for cholera, typhoid, and dehydrating diseases that could come as a result of the stagnant water and other conditions." Around the world, newspapers and other media evoked the spectre of cholera in the United States, the world's hygienic superpower. A newspaper in Columbus, Ohio, reported that New Orleans was a cesspool of "enough cholera germs to wipe out Los Angeles." And a paper in Tennessee, where some New Orleans refugees had arrived, whipped up fear among the locals with the headline "KATRINA EVACUEE DIAGNOSED WITH CHOLERA."

There was to be no outbreak of cholera in New Orleans, nor among the residents who fled. Despite raw sewage and decomposing bodies floating in the toxic brew that drowned the city, cholera was never likely to happen: there was little evidence that the specific bacteria that cause cholera were present. But the point had been made: Katrina had reduced a great American city to Third World conditions. Twenty-first-century America had had a cholera scare.

Cholera is a horrific illness. The onset of the disease is typically quick and spectacular; you can be healthy one moment and dead within hours. The disease, left untreated, has a fatality rate that can reach fifty per cent. The first sign that you have it is a sudden and explosive watery diarrhea, classically described as "rice-water stool," resembling the water in which rice has been rinsed and sometimes having a fishy smell. White specks floating in the stool are bits of lining from the small intestine. As a result of water loss—vomiting often accompanies diarrhea, and as much as a litre of water may be lost per hour—your eyes become sunken; your body is racked with agonizing cramps; the skin becomes leathery; lips and face turn blue; blood pressure drops; heartbeat becomes irregular; the amount of oxygen reaching your cells diminishes. Once you enter hypovolemic shock, death can follow within minutes. A mid-nineteenth-century English newspaper report described cholera victims who were "one minute warm, palpitating, human organisms—the next a sort of galvanized corpse, with icy breath, stopped pulse, and blood congealed—blue, shrivelled up, convulsed." Through it all, and until the very last stages, is the added horror of full consciousness. You are aware of what's happening: "the mind within remains untouched and clear,—shining strangely through the glazed eyes . . . a spirit, looking out in terror from a corpse."

You may know precisely what is going to happen to you because cholera is an epidemic disease, and unless you are fortunate enough to be the first victim you have probably seen many others die of it, possibly members of your own family, since the disease often affects households en bloc. Once cholera begins, it can spread with terrifying speed. Residents of cities in its path used to track cholera's approach in the daily papers, panic growing as nearby cities were struck. Those who have the means to flee do, and the refugees cause panic in the places to which they've fled. Writing from Paris during the 1831-32 epidemic, the poet Heinrich Heine said that it "was as if the end of the world had come." The people fell on the victims "like beasts, like maniacs."

Cholera is now remarkably easy to treat: the key is to quickly provide victims with large amounts of fluids and electrolytes. That simple regime can reduce the fatality rate to less than one per cent. In 2004, there were only five cases of cholera reported to the Centers for Disease Control, four of which were acquired outside the U.S., and none of which

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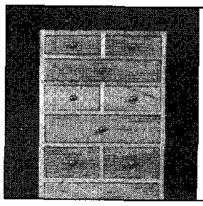
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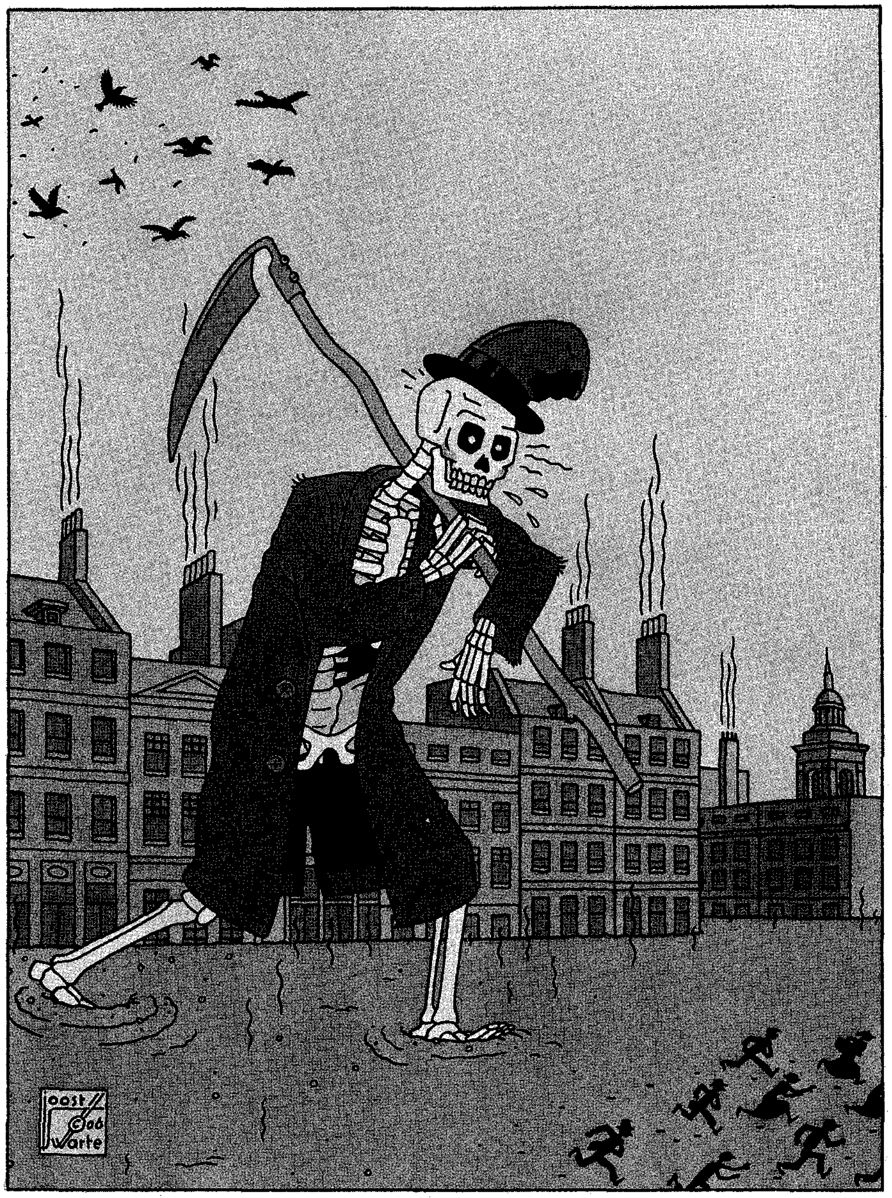
proved fatal. Epidemic cholera is now almost exclusively a Third World illness—often appearing in the wake of civil wars and natural disasters—and it is a major killer only in places lacking the infrastructure for effective emergency treatment. Within the last several years, there has been cholera in Angola, Sudan (including Darfur), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and an arc of West African countries from Senegal to Niger. In the early nineteen-nineties, there were more than a million cases in Latin America, mass deaths from cholera among the refugees from Rwandan genocide in 1994, and regular outbreaks in India and Bangladesh, especially after floods. The World Health Organization calls cholera "one of the key indicators of social development." Its presence is a sure sign that people are not living with civilized amenities.

Cholera is caused by a comma-shaped bacterium—*Vibrio cholerae*—whose role was identified by the German physician Robert Koch in 1883. By far the most common route of infection is drinking contaminated water. And, since water comes to contain *V. cholerae* through the excrement of cholera victims, an outbreak of the disease is evidence that people have been drinking each other's feces. Much of modern civilization has been geared toward making sure that this doesn't happen. One reason is simply that it's disgusting, but another reason is that it puts us at risk of cholera—a discovery owing largely to the work of a mid-nineteenth-century English doctor named John Snow. His work is celebrated in Steven Johnson's vivid history "The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic—and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World" (Riverhead; $26.95). Snow didn't know about *V. cholerae*, but identifying contaminated water as the vehicle of transmission has made him one of medical history's heroes.



The miasma that was thought to cause cholera was linked to the squalor of the poor.

JOOST SWARTE

The word "cholera" derives from *choler*—the Greek word for yellow bile—perhaps because of the pale appearance of the resulting evacuations. Hippocrates mentioned cholera as a common post-childhood disease, but given that he thought it might be brought on by eating goat's meat he was probably referring to a less malign form of diarrhea. It was almost certainly not the life-threatening epidemic disease that emerged from India in 1817 and which then began its spread around the world, travelling, as Snow said, "along the great tracks of human intercourse"—colonialism and global trade. The first pandemic of what the British and the Americans called Asiatic cholera (or cholera morbus) reached Southeast Asia, East Africa, the Middle East, and the Caucasus, but petered out in 1823. A second pandemic, between 1826 and 1837, also originated in India, but this time it took a devastating toll on both Europe and America, arriving in Britain in the autumn of 1831 and in America the following year. By 1833, twenty thousand people had died of cholera in England and Wales, with London especially hard hit. A third pandemic swept England and Wales in 1848-49 (more than fifty thousand dead) and again in 1854, when thirty thousand died in London alone.

At the time, the idea that cholera might be transmitted by a waterborne poison ran against the grain of medical opinion. Disease was not generally viewed as a "thing"—a specific pathological entity caused by a specific external agency. Instead, it was common to suppose that diseases reflected an imbalance of the four humors (blood, phlegm, and yellow and black bile), an imbalance ascribed to a large range of behaviors and environmental factors. Moreover, epidemic disease—literally, disease coming "upon the people"—was then widely ascribed not to contagion but to atmospheric "miasmas." In the seventeenth

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century, the great English physician Thomas Sydenham had introduced the notion of an "epidemic constitution of the atmosphere." Something had contaminated the local air (possibly, he thought, noxious effluvia from "the bowels of the earth") in a way that unbalanced the humors. The occasional appearance of these effluvia accounted for the intermittent character of epidemic disease. The miasmal theory remained medical orthodoxy for about two centuries. (We owe to it the name of the disease malaria: literally, "bad air.") In mid-nineteenth-century usage, a disease was called "epidemic" if it was *not* thought to be "contagious."

The fact that the poor suffered most in many epidemics was readily accommodated by the miasmal theory: certain people—those who lived in areas where the atmosphere was manifestly contaminated and who led a filthy and unwholesome way of life—were "predisposed" to be afflicted. The key indicator of miasma was stench. An aphorism of the nineteenth-century English sanitary reformer Edwin Chadwick was "All smell is disease." Sydenham's belief in a subterranean origin of miasmas gradually gave way to the view that they were caused by the accumulation of putrefying organic materials—a matter of human responsibility. As Charles E. Rosenberg's hugely influential work "The Cholera Years" (1962) noted, when Asiatic cholera first made its appearance in the United States, in 1832, "Medical opinion was unanimous in agreeing that the intemperate, the imprudent, the filthy were particularly vulnerable." During an early outbreak in the notorious Five Points neighborhood of Manhattan, a local newspaper maintained that this was an area inhabited by the most wretched specimens of humanity: "Be the air pure from Heaven, their breath would contaminate it, and infect it with disease." The map of cholera seemed so intimately molded to the moral order that, as Rosenberg put it, "to die of cholera was to die in suspicious circumstances." Rather like syphilis, it was taken as a sign that you had lived in a way you ought not to have lived. "The great mass of people . . . don't know that the miasma of an unscavenged street or impure alley is productive of cholera and disease," the English liberal economic activist Richard Cobden observed in 1853. "If they did know these things, people would take care that they inhabited better houses."

Élite presumptions to the contrary, the London poor did not enjoy living in squalor. In 1849, a group of them wrote a joint letter to the London *Times:*

> We live in muck and filthe. We aint got no priviz, no dust bins, no drains, no watersplies. . . . The Stenche of a Gully-hole is disgustin. We all of us suffer, and numbers are ill, and if the Colera comes Lord help us. . . . We are livin like piggs, and it aint faire we shoulde be so ill treted.

But some sanitary reformers, Florence Nightingale among them, opposed contagionism precisely because they believed that the poor were personally responsible for their filth: contagionism undermined your ability to hold people to account for their unwholesome way of life. Whereas, in a miasmal view of the world, the distribution of disease followed the contours of morality—your nose just knew it—infection by an external agent smacked of moral randomness.

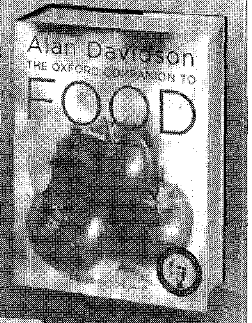
What to do? In the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a host of nostrums for sale. In fashionable Paris, people put their faith in flannel: *Le Figaro* proclaimed, "Today, Venus would wear a flannel girdle," and Heine added, "The King, too, now wears a belly-band of the best bourgeois flannel." Another popular preventative was to surround yourself with camphor vapors to counteract the noxious smell, and still another was to smother your food with garlic. On a neighborhood scale, you might achieve the same effect by burning tar, pitch, sugar, or vinegar, or by liberal use of chloride of lime in the home and on the streets, its bleachy smell giving olfactory assurance that the miasmas had been effectively countered. On a municipal level, one of the most important courses of action was to empty out the thousands of back-yard cesspools in which household excrement was kept and which periodically overflowed and ran down the streets in brown, reeking rivers. You could also pray: insofar as cholera was a divine scourge, you could supplement a renewed dedication to God's laws of wholesome living by beseeching divine benevolence. Days of prayer, fasting, and humiliation were decreed. A calm and pious state of mind was recommended. Temperate feeding and drinking were prescribed; debauchery was contraindicated. Moderation in these things was not only good morality; it was good medicine. In the 1832 outbreak, many New Yorkers reassured themselves that the only countries that had yet suffered grievously were heathen: Christian America would surely *not* be hard punished.

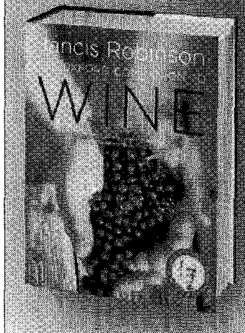
When cholera hit London in 1848, John Snow was well placed to doubt the miasmal theory. A founding member of the London Epidemiological Society, Snow was also an anesthetist—administering gas to Queen Victoria at the first chloroform-assisted royal birth—and he had made a study of gaseous diffusion. Why was it, he wondered, that people most exposed to these supposedly noxious miasmas—sewer workers, for example—were no more likely to be afflicted with cholera than anyone else? Snow also knew that the concentration of gases declined rapidly over distance, so how could a miasma arising from one source pollute the atmosphere of a whole neighborhood, or even a city? Why, if many of those closest to the stench were unaffected, did some of those far removed from it become ill? And there were some notable outbreaks of cholera that didn't appear to fit with the moral and evidential underpinnings of miasmal theory. Sometimes the occupants of one building fell ill while those in an adjacent building, at least as squalid, escaped. Moreover, cholera attacked the alimentary, not the respiratory, tract. Why should that be, if the vehicle of contagion was in the air as opposed to something ingested?

Snow's attempt to make sense of these observations, in the years after the 1848 epidemic, led him to the water supply. He began to look at the physical networks by which London's neighborhoods were served with water. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the municipal supply was a hodgepodge of ancient and more modern history. From medieval times, water had been drawn both from urban wells and from the Thames and its tributaries. In the early seventeenth century, the so-called New River was constructed; it carried Hertfordshire spring water, by gravity alone, to Clerkenwell, a distance of almost forty miles. During the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth, a number of private water companies were established, taking water from the Thames and using newly invented steam pumps to deliver it by iron pipe. By the middle of the nineteenth century, there were about ten companies supplying London's water. Many of these companies drew their water from within the Thames's tidal section, where the city's sewage was also dumped, thus providing customers with excrement-contaminated drinking water. In the early eighteen-fifties, Parliament had ordered the water companies to shift their intake pipes above the tideway by August of 1855: some complied quickly; others dragged their feet.

When cholera returned, in 1854, Snow was able to identify a number of small districts served by two water companies, one still supplying a fecal cocktail and one that had moved its intake pipes to Thames Ditton, above the tidal section. Snow compiled tables showing a strong connection in these districts between cholera mortality and water source. Snow's "grand experiment" was supposed to be decisive: there were no pertinent variables distinguishing the two populations other than the origins of their drinking water. As it turned out, the critical evidence came not from this study of commercially piped river water but from a fine-grained map showing the roles of different wells. Snow lived on Sackville Street, just around the corner from the Royal Academy of Arts, and in late August cholera erupted practically next door, in an area of Soho. It was, Snow later wrote, "the most terrible outbreak of cholera which ever occurred in this kingdom"—more than five hundred deaths in ten days.

Snow now had the theory and the statistics to chart this epidemic and to establish its waterborne cause. Using the *Weekly Return of Births and Deaths*, which was published by William Farr, a statistician in the Office of the Registrar-General, and a staunch anti-contagionist, Snow homed in on the microstructure of the epidemic. He began to suspect contaminated water in a well on Broad Street whose pump served households in about a two-block radius. The well had nothing to do with commercially piped water—which in this neighborhood happened to be relatively pure—but it was suspicious nonetheless. Scientists at the time knew no more about the invisi-





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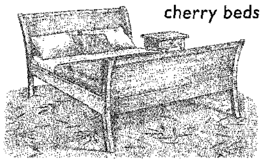

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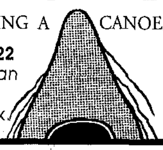

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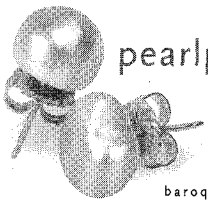

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ble constituents of the water supply than they did about the attributes of specific miasmas—Snow wrote that the "morbid poison" of cholera "must necessarily have some sort of structure, most likely that of a cell," but he could not see anything that looked relevant under the microscope—so even Snow still used smell as an important diagnostic sign. He recorded a local impression that, at the height of the outbreak, the Broad Street well water had an atypically "offensive smell," and that those who were deterred by it from drinking the water did not fall ill. What Snow needed was not the biological or chemical identity of the "morbid poison," or formal proof of causation, but a powerful rhetoric of persuasion. The map Snow produced, in 1854, plotted cholera mortality house by house in the affected area, with bars at each address that showed the number of dead. The closer you lived to the Broad Street pump, the higher the pile of bars. A few streets away, around the pump at the top of Carnaby Street, there were scarcely any bars, and slightly farther, near the Warwick Street pump, there were none at all.

The map occupies a deservedly prominent place in Edward R. Tufte's 1983 masterpiece "The Visual Display of Quantitative Information," but it was not in itself decisive. Suppose that the cholera-causing miasmas were just concentrated that way? But Snow's study of the neighborhood enabled him to add persuasive anecdotal evidence to the anonymity of statistics. Just across from the Broad Street pump was the Poland Street workhouse, whose wretched inmates, living closely packed in miserable conditions, should have been ideal cholera victims. Yet the disease scarcely touched them. The workhouse, it emerged, had its own well and a piped supply from a company with uncontaminated Thames water. Similarly, there were no cholera deaths among the seventy workers in the Lion Brewery, on Broad Street. They drank mainly malt liquor, and the brewery had its own well. What Snow called the "most conclusive" evidence concerned a widow living far away, in salubrious Hampstead, and her niece, who lived in "a high and healthy part of Islington": neither had gone anywhere near Broad Street, and both succumbed to cholera within days of its Soho outbreak. It turned out that the widow used to live in the affected area, and had developed a taste for the Broad Street well water. She had secured a supply on August 31st, and, when her niece visited, both drank from the same deadly bottle.

Next, Snow had to show how the Broad Street well had got infected, and for this he made use of the detailed knowledge of a local minister, Henry Whitehead. The minister had at first been skeptical of Snow's waterborne theories, but became convinced by the evidence the doctor was gathering. Whitehead discovered that the first, or "index," case of the Soho cholera was a child living on Broad Street: her diapers had been rinsed in water that was then tipped into a cesspool in front of a house just a few feet away from the well. The cesspool leaked and so, apparently, did the well. Snow persuaded the parish Board of Guardians to remove the handle from the Broad Street pump, pretty much ending the Soho cholera outbreak. There's now a replica of the handleless pump outside a nearby pub named in John Snow's honor.

Johnson is aware that Snow's victory was not instantaneous or uncontested. Neither the medical community nor policymakers were immediately convinced. For all Snow's wisdom, dedication, and intellectual originality, the parish board that removed the pump handle did not specifically accept his theory. The national Board of Health saw "no reason" to fall in with Snow; and the miasmal theory was flexible enough to accommodate even some of his purportedly crucial evidence. (Suppose, for example, that poisons in the atmosphere were what infected the Broad Street water.) Johnson calls this "circular argumentation at its most devious," and, of course, in retrospect, the Board of Health was wrong. But attempting to save a scientific theory that seemed so well supported, and that had survived for so long, is neither as irrational as outside commentators suppose nor as historically rare as they would like.

Snow gradually gained more supporters, but the major public-health reforms of the ensuing years were not direct results of his work, and some were even inspired by the miasmal theory that he did so much to combat. In the oppressively

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hot summer of 1858, London was overwhelmed by what the papers called "the Great Stink." The already sewage-loaded Thames had begun to carry the additional burden of thousands of newly invented flush water closets, and improved domestic sanitation was producing the paradoxical result of worsened public sanitation. The Thames had often reeked before, but this time politicians fled the Houses of Parliament, on the river's embankment, or attended with handkerchiefs pressed to their noses. "Whoso once inhales the stink can never forget it," a newspaper reported, "and can count himself lucky if he live to remember it." Measures to clean up the Thames had been on the agenda for some years, but an urgent fear of miasmas broke a political logjam, and gave immediate impetus to one of the great monuments of Victorian civil engineering: Sir Joseph Bazalgette's system of municipal sewers, designed to deposit London's waste below the city and far from the intakes of its water supply. (The system became fully operational in the mid-eighteen-seventies, and its pipes and pumps continue to serve London today.)

In the event, the Great Stink's effects on municipal health were negligible: the *Weekly Return* showed no increase in deaths from epidemic disease, confounding miasmatists' expectations. When cholera returned to London in 1866, its toll was much smaller, and the main outbreak was traced to a section of Bazalgette's system which had yet to be completed. In many people's opinion, Snow, who had died in 1858, now stood vindicated. And yet the improved municipal water system that rid the city of cholera had been promoted by sanitary reformers who held to the miasmal theory of disease—people who believed that sewage-laden drinking water was only a minor source of miasmas, but disgusting all the same. The right things were done, but not necessarily for the right scientific reasons.

The brilliance of Snow's map lay, as Johnson argues, in the way that it layered knowledge of different scales—from a bird's-eye view of the structure of the Soho neighborhood to the aggregated mortality statistics printed in the *Weekly Return* to the location of neighborhood water supplies—all framed by particular understandings of how people tended to move about in the neighborhood, of the physical proximity of particular cesspools to particular wells, and of the likely behavior of specific, still invisible, and still unnamed pathogens. A city is a concentration of knowledge as much as it is a concentration of people, buildings, thoroughfares, pipes, and bacteria. Maps like Snow's allowed the modern city to remake itself and to understand itself in a new way. They collected different sorts of knowledge, represented them vividly on the scale of a tabletop, and made that representation available as a resource for urban reform: a plan and a plan of action. If Snow's theory was not the major cause of Victorian sanitary reforms, maps like his were certainly one element in a historical revolution in urban living and in how our culture came to think about urban life: no longer subject to the caprices of divine will but a human environment whose well-being was in the care of human institutions and the expert knowledge contained within those institutions; no longer a pustulating excrescence on the divinely ordained pastoral order—"the Great Wen," as William Cobbett called London—but the natural habitat for humankind, teeming, sociable, and now, at last, healthy. Modern medical theory helped bring about that state of affairs, but so did a more diffuse sense of what it means to live in a civilized state.

Of course, this is a state that continues to elude much of the world—including all those underdeveloped countries which are currently experiencing what epidemiologists call the Seventh Pandemic. The problem is no longer an incorrect understanding of the cause: around the world, people have known for more than a century what you have to do to prevent cholera. Rather, cholera persists because of infrastructural inadequacies that arise from such social and political circumstances as the Third World's foreign-debt burdens, inequitable world-trade regimes, local failures of urban planning, corruption, crime, and incompetence. Victorian London illustrates how much could be done with bad science; the continuing existence of cholera in the Third World shows that even good science is impotent without the resources, the institutions, and the will to act. ♦

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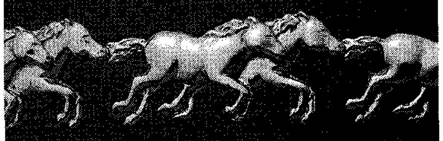

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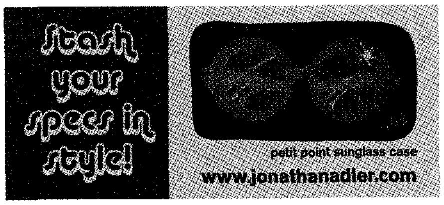

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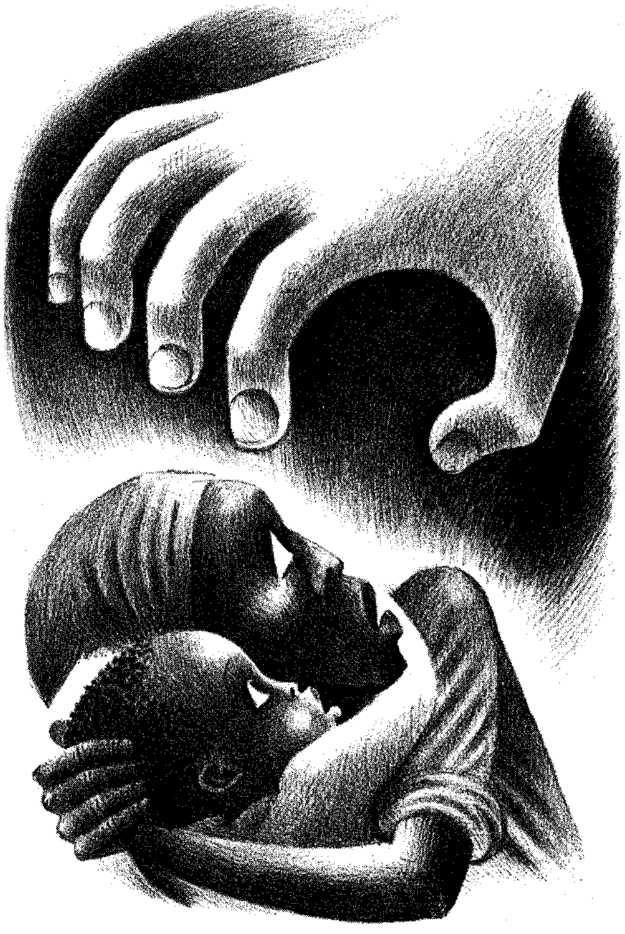
BOOKS

DOWN THE RIVER

The annotated "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

BY JOHN UPDIKE

The best-selling American novel of the nineteenth century, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," by Harriet Beecher Stowe, does not quite go away, much as many Americans, from black militants to white aesthetes, might wish it. Within a year of its publication, in March of 1852, it had sold three hundred thousand copies, in a country one-thirteenth its present size and—in a surprising show of Victorian globalization—more than two million in the rest of the world. Ten years later, in 1862, Abraham Lincoln allegedly greeted its diminutive author in the White House with the words "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war!" The President's subsequent abolition of slavery and the Union's hard-won victory in the Civil War would seem to have taken the wind out of Stowe's fiercely abolitionist novel of ideas, but its melodramatic images—the Kentucky slave Eliza's flight across the ice-choked Ohio River, pursued by bloodhounds, with her son in her arms; the Louisiana slaveholder Simon Legree's boastful villainy; fair-haired little Eva's saintly death and the snaggle-headed black orphan Topsy's reluctant reformation—persisted, though travestied, in popular plays, shows, films, figurines, and cartoons.



A drawing by Miguel Covarrubias for a 1938 edition.

MIGUEL COVARRUBIAS

American readership did slowly decline, to the point that only secondhand copies were available when, in 1948, Modern Library reprinted the text, but "Uncle Tom's Cabin" continued to be read in Europe, especially in Russia, and by Anglophone men of letters. George Orwell cited it as the "supreme example" of a "'good bad' book": "It is an unintentionally ludicrous book, full of preposterous melodramatic incidents; it is also deeply moving and essentially true." Edmund Wilson and Alfred Kazin gave it their critical attention; Kazin noted Henry James's recollection of his childhood reading, when "one lived and moved at the time, with great intensity, in Mrs. Stowe's novel," and his curious judgment that no other book "probably ever reached its mark, the mark of exciting interest, without having at least groped for that goal *as* a book or by the exposure of some literary side." In postwar academia, the novel excited interest as a female production during an "American renaissance" of masculine masterpieces canonized by such male critics as Lewis Mumford and F. O. Matthiessen. Stowe's biographer Joan D. Hedrick blames her subject's fall from critical grace on "the removal of literature from the parlor to institutions to which women had limited access: men's clubs, high-culture journals, and prestigious universities." Now a prominent scholar of African-American literature, the Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has edited, with Hollis Robbins, of Johns Hopkins University, "The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin" (Norton; $39.95), the latest in a select series that began with Martin Gardner's "The Annotated Alice" and has continued with oversized annotated editions of "The Wizard of Oz," "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," Dickens's "A Christmas Carol," and the tales of Sherlock Holmes.

In such iconic company, "Uncle Tom" seems uneasy. Gates and Robbins's annotations do not overflow the margins like those, say, of Michael Patrick Hearn as he gleefully spills all there is to know about Oz and its creator, L. Frank Baum, or exult in arcane erudition as Gardner does in exploring Lewis Carroll's pedantically loaded Wonderland. Gates and Robbins provide, beyond an introduction preoccupied with James Baldwin and Richard Wright, some historical background on the slave trade and the cotton industry, the chapter and verse for Stowe's numerous Biblical quotations, and a wealth of illustrations that the novel received in the course of its many editions—reproduced at too small a scale, sometimes, to bear out the racist nuances described in the captions. The least suspect illustrations, by the celebrated Mexican caricaturist Miguel Covarrubias, adorned a 1938 edition; the others tend to whiten sympathetic black characters and to desexualize Uncle Tom, who, as the father of very young children, must possess a virility belied by his presentation as an avuncular oldster. The bound galleys, interestingly, sported on their cover an incongruously jubilant bevy of minstrel-show darkies; the jacket of the finished book has demurely substituted an ivy-clad log cabin limned for the first edition by Hammatt Billings.

The voice of the annotations fluctuates between "we" and a first-person singular that can sound downright petulant:

> Without good looks or interesting verbiage to keep us interested, I am close to turning the page. Perhaps Stowe has learned too well from Jane Austen, whose long monologues of Miss Bates (in *Emma*) bore us silly.

Not infrequently, the notes, printed in red, become an irritable sniping from the sidelines: "There is no way to completely explain away the narrator's ugly tone here"; "Another instance of racist thought: Eliza's face is black *but* comely"; "This description serves little real purpose . . . but it pleased Stowe greatly to write"; "We didn't really need more evidence of Haley's hard-heartedness, but Stowe has provided it anyway"; "Clearly Stowe is pandering to her older female readership here"; "One of many hints to Stowe's readers that Eva is not long for this world"; "The episode is plodding. I confess that my eyes glaze over"; "George is a bit too talky in this scene"; "Where, one asks again, are the things that remind him of Chloe?"

Indeed, this reader, with a hundred pages to go, switched from the wide-format, double-focussed annotated version to the text as presented by the Library of America, where the feverish and nakedly exhortative climax is allowed to work its laborious spell without editorial heckling. I found Stowe's fervor infectious. Her political aim—to provide a panorama, with a range of specimen slaves and masters, that would show black slavery in the United States to be an odious institution, poisoning all it touches—is achieved several times over, and is not a unique achievement; the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act, as part of the Compromise of 1850, made all Americans legally obligated to help recapture escaped slaves, and spurred an upwelling of abolitionist eloquence. Stowe emphasizes, in her protest novel, the slaves' complete lack of human rights, including those of self-defense and of offering court testimony; what attachments and families they created were destroyed at whim by their owners, whose human property could be sold down the river, pursued through every state and territory, and, in the case of young females, exploited as a harem.

Stowe was born in Connecticut, the seventh child and fourth daughter of Lyman Beecher, later the president of Lane Theological Seminary, and the sister of the prominent and eventually notorious preacher Henry Ward Beecher. When she was twenty-one, she moved with her family to Cincinnati, across the Ohio River from Kentucky and a prime stop on the underground railroad that smuggled escaped slaves into Canada. For her novel, she relied on reports in the Cincinnati press, published slave narratives, personal acquaintance with freed and refugee slaves, and a single visit, in 1834, to Kentucky. In 1850, she moved, with her husband, Calvin Stowe, and their five children, back to New England, where her husband had accepted a position as Collins Professor of Natural and Revealed Religion at Bowdoin College. As she undertook, that same year, the writing of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," the Cincinnati years gave concreteness and warmth to her imaginings; her sojourn there helps account for her confident, spirited use of Southern idiom, both the "linguistic capering of Sam and Andy"—bantering black characters—and the "barroom conviviality" of racist whites. Gates and Robbins compliment Stowe's dialogue among blacks as "very contemporary sounding and surprisingly accurate."

Coming to read "Uncle Tom's Cabin" for the first time, I was unprepared for its bursts of humor. Its most famous episode, Eliza's crossing to freedom on the ice cakes, is rendered twice, once as harrowing subjective sensation—

> In that dizzy moment her feet to her scarce seemed to touch the ground, and a moment brought her to the water's edge. Right on behind they [hounds and a posse of slavers] came; and, nerved with strength such as God gives only to the desperate, with one wild cry and flying leap, she vaulted sheer over the turbid current by the shore, on to the raft of ice beyond. . . . The huge green fragment of ice on which she alighted pitched and creaked as her weight come on it, but she staid there not a moment. With wild cries and desperate energy she leaped to another and still another cake;—stumbling—leaping—slipping—springing upwards again! Her shoes are gone—her stockings cut from her feet—while blood marked every step; but she saw nothing, felt nothing, till dimly, as in a dream, she saw the Ohio side, and a man helping her up the bank—

and then, some pages on, through the

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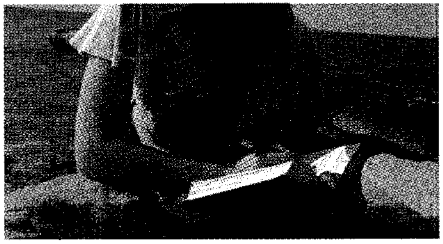

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telling of a black pursuer, as physical comedy:

> "We come right behind her, and I thought my soul he'd got her sure enough,—when she gin sich a screech as I never hearn, and thar she was, clar over t' other side the current, on the ice, and then on she went, a screeching and a jumpin',—the ice went crack! c'wallop! cracking! chunk! and she a boundin' like a buck! Lord, the spring that ar gal's got in her an't common, I'm o' 'pinion."

Stowe read Dickens aloud to her children, and must have learned from him, and from Shakespeare, how to leaven a grim story with comic relief; even Legree's hellish plantation has on it two clowns, the brutish black henchmen Sambo and Quimbo, who finally leave off villainy to become Christian converts.

James Baldwin, the stepson of a Harlem preacher who, Baldwin wrote, "having taken his own conversion too literally never, at bottom, forgave the white world . . . for having saddled him with a Christ in whom, to judge at least from their treatment of him, they themselves no longer believed," inveighed, in the overwrought indictment titled "Everybody's Protest Novel," against the religiosity of Stowe's book:

> Here, black equates with evil and white with grace; if, being mindful of the necessity of good works, she could not cast out the blacks—a wretched, huddled mass, apparently, claiming, like an obsession, her inner eye—she could not embrace them either without purifying them of sin. She must cover their intimidating nakedness, robe them in white, the garments of salvation.

There can be no denying that "Uncle Tom's Cabin" insistently presents Christianity as the main means of black integration—the path to respectability, the call to liberation, the antidote to despair (though Stowe, like Baldwin, concluded that anti-black racism is so ingrained in the United States that a black man would do better living elsewhere, be it Liberia or Europe). Christianity in Dickens or Trollope is just a lick and a promise compared with Christianity for Stowe. The daughter and wife of theologians, she repeatedly confronts the most accessible argument for atheism, God's apparent silence and indifference to human suffering. She herself, in 1849, had lost an infant son to cholera, and the novel's most eloquent atheist, Legree's concubine, the ladylike quadroon Cassy, has killed her infant son with laudanum rather than let him live as a slave. She tells Tom, the novel's central embodiment of submissive faith, after Legree has given him a savage beating:

> "There's no use calling on the Lord—he never hears . . . ; there isn't any God, I believe; or, if there is, he's taken sides against us. All goes against us, heaven and earth. Everything is pushing us into hell. Why shouldn't we go?"

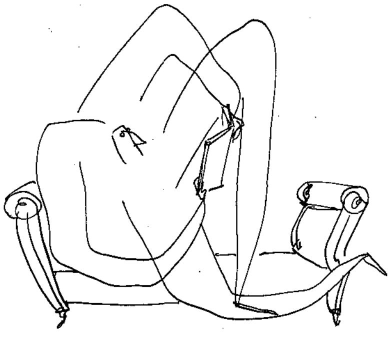
Similarly, Dinah, a hapless servant in the household of a decent but acquiescent and whimsical slaveholder and his unconscionably selfish wife, has earlier described to Tom how "Missis tuck sick" and forced her to neglect her infant in caring for her: "She made me sleep in her room; and I had to put it away off in a little kind o' garret, and thar it cried itself to death, one night. It did; and I tuck to drinkin', to keep its crying out of my ears!" Tom tries to comfort her:

> "O, ye poor crittur," said Tom, "han't nobody never telled ye how the Lord Jesus loved ye, and died for ye? Han't they telled ye that he'll help ye, and ye can go to heaven, and have rest, at last?"

Debating with the more sophisticated and hardened Cassy, Tom nearly crumples:

> Tom folded his hands; all was darkness and horror.
>
> "O Jesus! Lord Jesus! have you quite forgot us poor critturs?" burst forth, at last;—"help, Lord, I perish!"

Yet this dark night of Tom's soul is followed by a fresh religious resolve. His answer to the problem of suffering is the traditional, creedal one: God incarnate suffered, too. "Wan't he allays poor?" Tom pleads with Cassy, "and have we, any on us, yet come so low as he come?" Newly settled in his faith, Tom in imitation of Christ embarks upon a path of quiet defiance that will take him to a martyr's death. Legree, who shows an unexpected taste for debate on high matters ("This yer religion is all a mess of lying trumpery, Tom. I know all about it. Ye'd better hold to me; I'm somebody,



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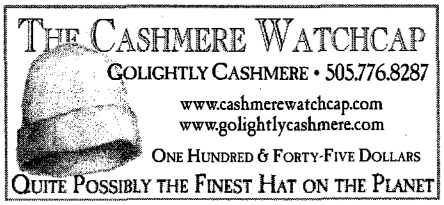

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and can do something!"), can no longer touch Tom where he lives. The novel's huge success stemmed, it may be, as much from its vivid religious affirmations as from its attack on slavery. Stowe, who experienced a religious rebirth at the age of thirty-one, had dwelled longer and more deeply with Christianity than with abolitionism. The two in any case were entwined; the nation's compact with slavery was to provoke, in the minimally religious Abraham Lincoln, his Second Inaugural's grave reflections on divine punishment:

> If God wills that [the war] continue until all the wealth piled up by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

"Uncle Tom's Cabin," long relegated to the archives of another century's popular sensations, popped back into critical favor in 1996, when the novelist Jane Smiley wrote in a *Harper's* article of rereading, while laid up with a broken leg, Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn" for the first time since junior high school and finding herself "stunned . . . by the notion . . . that this is a great novel, that this is even a serious novel." Having surveyed "Huck" 's shortcomings as a treatment of black-white relations, even in the eighteen-forties, she subjected it to invidious comparison with Stowe's uncanonized best-seller:

> Ernest Hemingway, thinking of himself, as always, once said that all American literature grew out of *Huck Finn*. It undoubtedly would have been better for American literature, and American culture, if our literature had grown out of one of the best-selling novels of all time, another American work of the nineteenth century, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which for its portrayal of an array of thoughtful, autonomous, and passionate black characters leaves *Huck Finn* far behind.

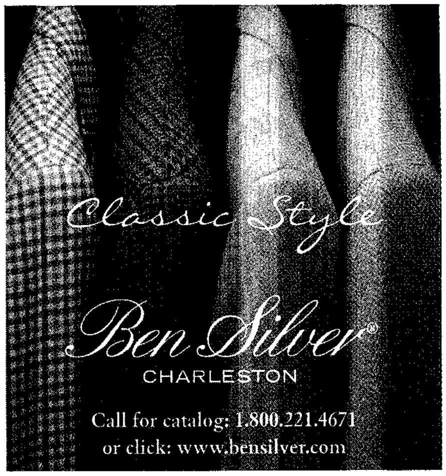
As Smiley could have foreseen, a host of professors and critics, mostly male, rose to defend "Huck," already under heavy siege from black parents and school authorities offended by the book's anarchic spirit and liberal employment of the word "nigger." Yet it is impossible, for at least this reader, to dip into the first half of the book without being seduced by the informal beauty of the boy narrator's voice and the natural, easy density of the realism. Religion, in Huck's mouth, melts to a joke, and nature, heedless and carefree, takes over the canvas. America has never looked as broad, fresh, and majestic as the Mississippi does from Huck and Jim's raft. No wonder Hemingway, who was always looking for the secret of keeping prose honest, went overboard.

But in the second half, beginning with the Grangerford-Shepherdson feud, and more decidedly with the introduction of the Duke and the Dauphin, the novel's idyll curdles. Mark Twain's foolery and misanthropy swamp the raft; his romantic fascination with a storybook Middle Ages inspires quixotic divagations. It is painful to follow the improbable ins and outs of the plot that Tom Sawyer contrives to rescue Jim from Southern capture. When Tom appears in the book, Huck—the wiser, truly experienced boy—fades. The author makes a terrible miscalculation when he reveals that Tom knew all along that Jim had already been freed by his mistress's will. It's as if Mark Twain forgot what slavery is—the constriction of it, the implacability of it, all suspended while Tom Sawyer toys with a tediously extended, bookish prank. Jim, in a plot strand that could have come from "Uncle Tom's Cabin," has a wife and two children, one of them deaf, whom he hopes to buy into freedom; he is a responsible person, with hopes and plans. For his time on the raft, when he is allowed a free man's resourcefulness and time for reflection, he projects a more believable presence than any of Stowe's many black characters, all of whom exist in her pages to make a point, to illustrate an aspect of a problem. It seems too much to say, as Smiley does, that "the power of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the power of brilliant analysis married to great wisdom of feeling." Its power is that, crude and manipulative as parts of it are, it never makes light of slavery and its attendant vast misery. ♦

BLOCK THAT METAPHOR!

From the San Francisco Chronicle.

Though Dean claims that the "modern phase" of American conservatism ended with the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994, he first witnessed the fangs of the in utero beast at close range more than 30 years ago, in the Nixon White House.



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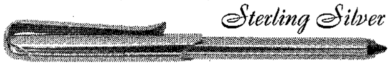

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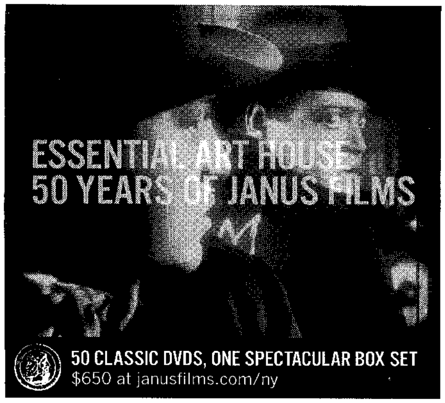
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BOOKS

DEAD RECKONING

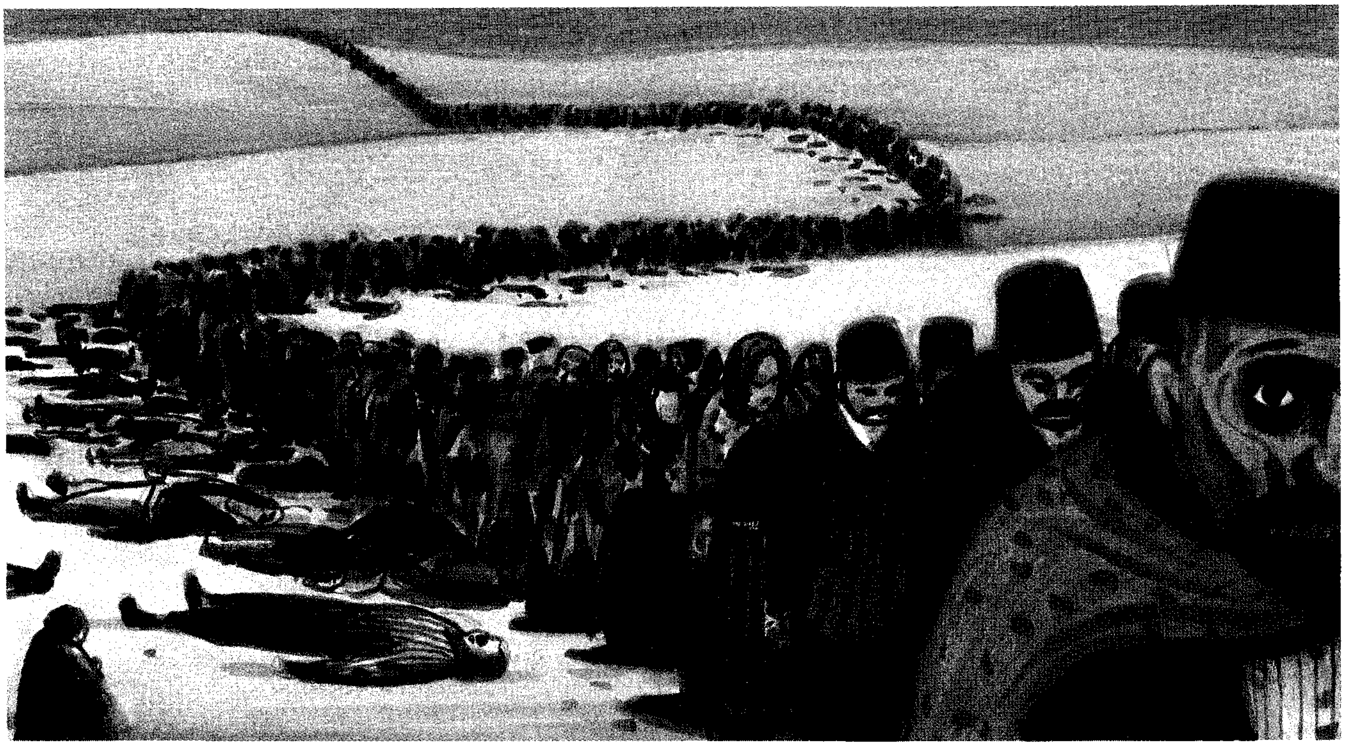
The Armenian genocide and the politics of silence.

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

On September 14, 2000, Representatives George Radanovich, Republican of California, and David Bonior, Democrat of Michigan, introduced a House resolution—later to be known as H.R. 596—on the slaughter of the Armenians. The measure urged the President, in dealing with the matter, to demonstrate "appropriate understanding and sensitivity." It further instructed him on how to phrase his annual message on the Armenian Day of Remembrance: the President should refer to the atrocities as "genocide." The bill was sent to the International Relations Committee and immediately came under attack. State Department officials reminded the committee that it was U.S. policy to "respect the Turkish government's assertions that, although many ethnic Armenians died during World War I, no genocide took place." Expanding on this theme, Secretary of Defense William Cohen, in a letter to Dennis Hastert, the Speaker of the House, wrote that while he in no way wanted to "downplay the Armenian tragedy. . . passing judgment on this history through legislation could have a negative impact on Turkish-Armenian relations and on our security interests in the region." After committee members voted, on October 3rd, to send H.R. 596 to the floor, Turkish officials warned that negotiations with an American defense contractor, Bell Textron, over four and a half billion dollars' worth of attack helicopters were in jeopardy. On October 5th, the leaders of all five parties in the Turkish parliament issued a joint statement threatening to deny the U.S. access to an airbase in Incirlik, which it was using to patrol northern Iraq. Finally, on October 19th, just a few hours before H.R. 596 was scheduled to be debated in the House, Hastert pulled it from the agenda. He had, he said, been informed by President Clinton that passage of the resolution could "risk the lives of Americans."

The defeat of H.R. 596 is a small but fairly typical episode in a great campaign of forgetting. Like President Clinton, President Bush continues to "respect the Turkish government's assertions" and to issue Armenian Remembrance Day proclamations each year without ever quite acknowledging what it is that's being remembered. If in Washington it's politically awkward to refer to the genocide, it is positively dangerous to do so in Istanbul. Last year, Turkey's leading author, Orhan Pamuk, was prosecuted merely for having brought up the subject in a press interview. "A million Armenians were killed and nobody but me dares to talk about it," he told the Sunday magazine of the Swiss newspaper *Tages-Anzeiger*. Pamuk, now a recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, was accused of having violated Section 301 of the Turkish penal code, which outlaws "insulting Turkishness." (The charge was eventually dropped, on a technicality.) A few months later, another prominent Turkish novelist, Elif Shafak, was charged with the same offense, for having a character in her most recent novel, "The Bastard of Istanbul," declare, "I am the grandchild of genocide survivors who lost all their relatives at the hands of Turkish butchers in 1915, but I myself have been brainwashed to deny the genocide." The charges were dropped after Shafak argued that the statement of a fictional person could not be used to prosecute a real one, then reinstated by a higher court, and then dropped again.

It is in this context that Taner Akcam's new history, "A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility" (Metropolitan; $30), must be considered. The book is dryly written and awkwardly translated, but nevertheless moving. Akcam grew up in far northeastern Turkey and was educated at Ankara's Middle East Technical University, where he became the editor of a leftist journal. In 1976, he was arrested and sentenced to ten years in prison for spreading propaganda. Using a stove leg to dig a tunnel, he managed to escape after a year, and fled to Germany. Akcam is one of the first Turkish historians to treat the Armenian genocide as genocide—he now lives in exile in Minnesota—and in "A Shameful Act" he tries to grapple both with the enormity of the crime and with the logic of its repression.



For Turks, to acknowledge the massacres would be to admit that modern Turkey was founded by war criminals.

LORENZO MATTOTTI

Any writer who takes on genocide as his topic accepts obligations that, if not exactly contradictory, are clearly in tension. The first is to describe the event in a way that is adequate to its exceptionality. (The original U.N. resolution on the subject, approved in 1946, describes genocide as an act that "shocks the conscience of mankind.") The second is to make sense of it, which is to say, to produce an account of the unspeakable that anyone can understand.

Akcam begins his history in the nineteenth century, when roughly two million Armenians were living in the Ottoman Empire, some in major cities like Istanbul and Izmir, and the rest in the provinces of central and eastern Anatolia. Already, the Armenians were in a peculiarly vulnerable position: Christians living in the heart of a Muslim empire, they were subject by law to special taxes and restrictions, and by tradition to extortion and harassment. As the century wore on, the so-called Sick Man of Europe kept shedding territory: first Greece, in the Greek War of Independence; and then, following the Russo-Turkish War, Serbia, Montenegro, Romania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. These humiliating defeats eroded the Ottomans' confidence, which, in turn, Akcam argues, "resulted in the loss of their tolerance." Muslim assaults on Christians increased throughout the empire, and the ancient prejudices against the Armenians hardened into something uglier.

In 1876, Sultan Abdülhamid II came to power. Abdülhamid, who ruled the empire for thirty-three of its last forty-six years, was a deeply anxious man, perhaps paranoid. He maintained a vast network of spies; turned Yildiz Palace, overlooking the Bosporus, into a ramshackle fort; and demanded that each dish be tasted by his chief chamberlain before being served. Abdülhamid soon took anti-Armenianism to new heights. (It was rumored that the Sultan's own mother, a former dancing girl, was Armenian, but he always denied this.) He shut down Armenian schools, threw Armenian teachers in jail, prohibited the use of the word "Armenia" in newspapers and textbooks, and formed special Kurdish regiments, known as the Hamidiye, whose raison d'être appears to have been to harass Armenian farmers. Encouraged by American and European missionaries, the Armenians turned to the outside world for help. The English, the French, and the Russians repeatedly demanded that Istanbul institute "reforms" on the Armenians' behalf. Officially, the Sultan acceded to these demands, only to turn around and repress the Armenians that much more vigorously. "By taking away Greece and Romania, Europe has cut off the feet of the Turkish state," Abdülhamid complained. "Now, by means of this Armenian agitation, they want to get at our most vital places and tear out our very guts. This would be the beginning of totally annihilating us, and we must fight against it with all the strength we possess."

In the mid-eighteen-nineties, tens of thousands of Armenians were murdered. The slaughter began in Sasun, in eastern Anatolia, where Armenians had refused to pay taxes on the ground that the government had failed to protect them from Kurdish extortion. The killings in Sasun provoked an international outcry, which

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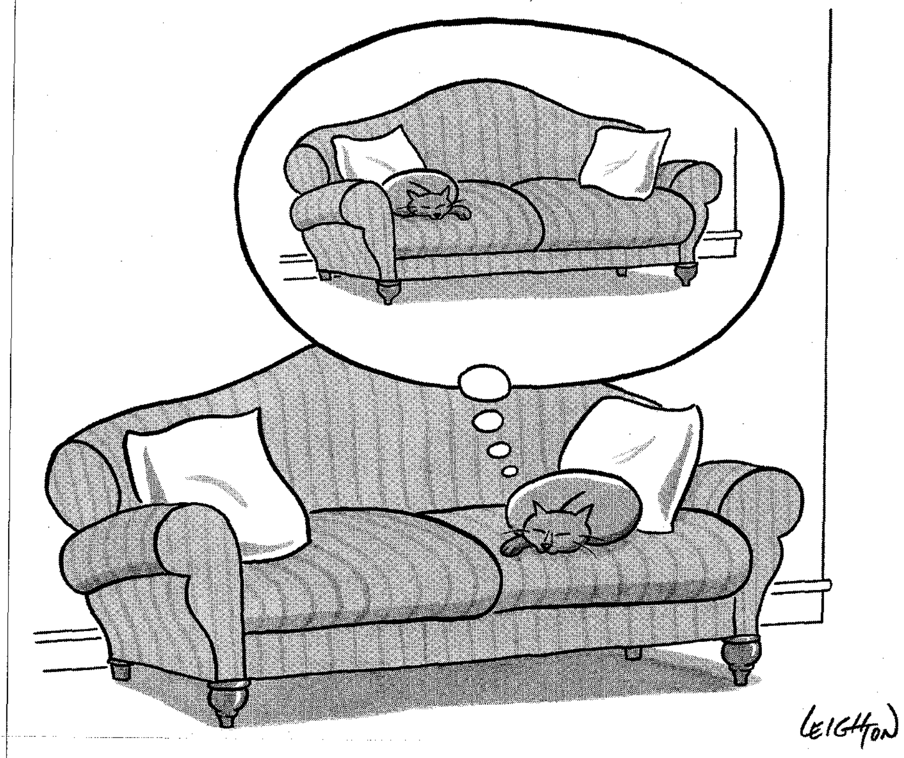

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was answered with the Sultan's usual promises of reform, and then with a string of even bloodier massacres in the provinces of Erzurum, Ankara, Sivas, Trabzon, and Harput. In the wake of the killings, William Gladstone, the former British Prime Minister, labelled Abdülhamid "the great assassin."

Finally, in 1909, Abdülhamid was pushed aside. The coup was engineered by a group composed, for the most part, of discontented Army officers—the original Young Turks. The Young Turks spoke loftily of progress and brotherhood—on the eve of the revolt, one of their leaders is said to have declared, "Under the blue sky we are all equal"—and the empire's remaining Christians celebrated their ascendancy. But the logic of slaughtering the Armenians had by this point been too well established.

When the First World War broke out, the Young Turks rushed to join the conflict. "That day of revenge, which has been awaited for centuries by the nation's young and old, by its martyrs and by its living, has finally arrived," the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies asserted in a letter to the armed forces. By 1914, the empire was being led by a troika—nicknamed the Three Pashas—composed of the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of the Navy, and the Minister of War. In December, the War Minister, Ismail Enver, decided to lead the Third Army in an attack against the Russians on the Caucasian front. Enver planned to press all the way east to Baku, in present-day Azerbaijan, where he hoped to incite the local Muslims to join the Ottomans' cause, and, as a first step, he ordered his forces to divide up and follow different routes to Sarikamish, a Russian military outpost. The idea was for all the troops to arrive at the same time and surprise the enemy with their strength; instead, they straggled in over a period of several days, with devastating results. The Ottomans lost about seventy-five thousand men at Sarikamish, out of a total force of ninety thousand. A German officer attached to the Third Army described the defeat as "a disaster which for rapidity and completeness is without parallel in military history." The Russians had encouraged the Armenians to form volunteer regiments to fight against the Ottomans, and some (though not many) had heeded this call. The Armenians' role in the disaster became one of the pretexts for the genocide.

On April 24, 1915, some two hundred and fifty prominent Armenians—poets, doctors, bankers, and even a member of the Ottoman parliament—were arrested in Istanbul. They were split up into groups, loaded onto trains, shipped off to remote prisons, and eventually killed. (The Armenian Day of Remembrance is marked each year on the anniversary of these arrests.) Around the same time, orders were issued to begin rounding up Armenians wholesale and deporting them. "Some regional variations notwithstanding," Akcam reports, the deportations "proceeded in the same manner everywhere." Armenians would be given a few days or, in some cases, just a few hours to leave their homes. The men were separated from the women and children, led beyond the town, and either tortured or murdered outright. Their families were then herded to concentration camps in the Syrian desert, often bound by ropes or chains. Along the way, they were frequently set upon by Kurdish tribesmen, who had been given license to loot and rape, or by the very gendarmes who were supposed to be guarding them. A Greek witness wrote of watching a column of deportees being led through the Kemakh Gorge, on the upper Euphrates. The guards "withdrew to the mountainside" and "began a hail of rifle fire," he wrote. "A few days later there was a mopping-up operation: since many little children were still alive and wandering about beside their dead parents." In areas where ammunition was in short supply, the killing squads relied on whatever weapons were at hand—axes, cleavers, even shovels. Adults were hacked to pieces, and infants dashed against the rocks. In the Black Sea region, Armenians were loaded onto boats and thrown overboard. In the area around Lake Hazar, they were tossed over cliffs.

At the time of the deportations, the U.S. had not yet entered the war. It maintained an extensive network of diplomats in the region, and many of these provided detailed chronicles of what they had seen, which Henry Morgenthau, the United States Ambassador in Istanbul, urgently forwarded to Washington. (Other eyewitness accounts came from German Army officers, Danish missionaries, and Armenian survivors.) In a dispatch sent to the State Department on November 1, 1915, the U.S. consul in Aleppo wrote:

> It is extremely rare to find a family intact that has come any considerable distance, invariably all having lost members from disease and fatigue, young girls and boys carried off by hostile tribesmen, and about all the men having been separated from the families and suffered fates that had best be left unmentioned, many being done away with in atrocious manners before the eyes of their relatives and friends. So severe has been the treatment that careful estimates place the number of survivors at only 15 percent of those originally deported. On this basis the number surviving even this far being less than 150,000 . . . there seems to have been about 1,000,000 persons lost up to this date.

An American businessman who made a tour of the lower Euphrates the next year reported having encountered "all along the road from Meskene to Der-i-Zor graves containing the remains of unfortunate Armenians abandoned and dead in atrocious suffering. It is by the hundreds that these mounds are numbered where sleep anonymously in their last sleep these outcasts of existence, these victims of barbary without qualification." Morgenthau repeatedly confronted the Ottoman Interior Minister, Mehmed Talât, with the contents of these dispatches, telling him that the Americans would "never forget these massacres." But the warnings made no impression. During one session, Morgenthau later recalled in a memoir, Talât turned to him and asked if he could obtain a list of Armenians who had purchased life-insurance policies with American firms. "They are practically all dead now, and have no heirs left to collect the money," the Interior Minister reasoned, and therefore the unclaimed benefits rightfully belonged to the government.

The official explanation for the Armenian deportations was that they were necessary for security reasons, and this is still the account provided by state-sanctioned histories today. "Facts on the Relocation of Armenians (1914-1918)," a volume produced by the Turkish Historical Society, was published in English in 2002. It begins with an epigram from John F. Kennedy ("For the great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived, and dishonest—but the myth, persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic") and the reassurance that it is "not a propaganda document." The book argues that Russia and its allies had "sown the seeds of intrigue and mischief among the Armenians, who in turn had been doing everything in their power to make life difficult for Ottoman armies." Deciding that "fundamental precautions" were needed, the Ottoman authorities took steps to "relocate" the Armenians away

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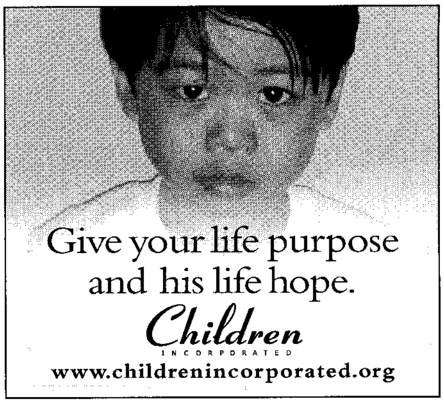
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from the front. They worked to insure that the transfer would be effected "as humanely as possible"; if this goal was not always realized, it was because of disease—so difficult to control during wartime—or rogue bands of "tribal people" who sometimes attacked Armenian convoys. "Whenever the government realized that some untoward incidents had taken place . . . the government acted very promptly and warned the local authorities." In support of this "Arbeit Macht Frei" version of events, "Facts on the Relocation of Armenians" cites the very Ottoman officials who oversaw the slaughter. Turkish officials, in turn, now cite works like "Facts" to support their claim that the period's history remains contested. In March, 2005, just before the commemoration of the ninetieth anniversary of the Day of Remembrance, the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, called for an "impartial study" to look into what had really happened to the Armenians. The International Association of Genocide Scholars responded that such a call could only be regarded as still more propaganda. "The Armenian Genocide is abundantly documented by thousands of official records . . . by eyewitness accounts of missionaries and diplomats, by the testimony of survivors, and by decades of historical scholarship," the association's directors wrote in a letter explaining their refusal to participate. An academic conference on the massacres planned for later that spring in Istanbul was banned by a court order. (After much maneuvering, it was held at a private university amid raucous protests.)

The Ottomans formally surrendered to the Allies on October 30, 1918. The Paris Peace Conference opened the following year, and it took another year for the Allies to agree on how to dispose of the empire. The pact that finally emerged—the Treaty of Sèvres—awarded Palestine, Transjordan, and Mesopotamia to the English, Syria and Lebanon to the French, Rhodes and a chunk of southern Anatolia to the Italians, and Izmir and western Anatolia to the Greeks. Eastern Anatolia, with a prize stretch of Black Sea coast, was to go to the Armenians. The Bosporus and the Dardanelles were to be demilitarized and placed under international control. From an imperial power the Turks were thus transformed into something very close to a subject people. This was the final disgrace and, as it turned out, also the start of a revival.

As the rulers of the Ottoman Empire, the Turks had been fighting against history; they had spent more than a century trying—often unsuccessfully—to fend off nationalist movements in the regions they controlled. Now, in defeat, they adopted the cause as their own. In the spring of 1920, the Turkish Nationalists, led by Mustafa Kemal—later to be known as Atatürk—established a new government in Ankara. (The government's founding is celebrated every April 23rd, one day before the Armenian Day of Remembrance.) During the next three years, the Nationalists fought a series of brutal battles, which eventually forced the Allies to abandon Sèvres. A new treaty was drawn up, the Treaty of Lausanne, and the Republic of Turkey was created. The big losers in this process were, once again, the Armenians: Lausanne returned all of Anatolia to Turkish control.

In Akcam's view, what happened between 1920 and 1923 is the key to understanding the Turks' refusal to discuss what happened in 1915. The Armenian genocide was what today would be called a campaign of ethnic cleansing, and as such it was highly effective. It changed the demographics of eastern Anatolia; then, on the basis of these changed demographics, the Turks used the logic of self-determination to deprive of a home the very people they had decimated. Although the genocide was not committed by the Nationalists, without it the nationalist project wouldn't have made much sense. Meanwhile, the Nationalists made sure that the perpetrators were never punished. Immediately after the end of the war, the Three Pashas fled the country. (The Interior Minister, Talât, was assassinated in Berlin by an Armenian who had been left for dead in a pile of corpses.) In an attempt to mollify the Allies, the Ottomans arrested scores of lower-ranking officials and put some of them on trial, but, when the Nationalists came to power, they suspended these proceedings and freed the suspects. A separate prosecution effort by the British, who were keeping dozens of Ottoman officers locked up in Malta, similarly came to nothing, and eventually the officers were sent home as part of a prisoner-of-war exchange. Several went on to become high-ranking members of Mustafa Kemal's government. For the Turks to acknowledge the genocide would thus mean admitting that their country was founded by war criminals and that its existence depended on their crimes. This, in Akcam's words, "would call into question the state's very identity." And so the Turks prefer to insist, as "Facts on the Relocation of Armenians" puts it, that the genocide is a "legend."

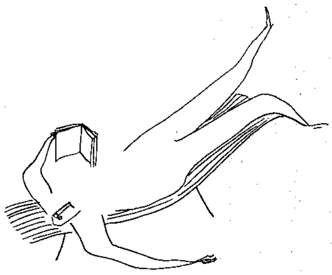
It is, of course, possible to question Akcam's highly psychologized account. Turkey has long sought to join the European Union, and, while a history of genocide is clearly no barrier to membership, denying it may be; several European governments have indicated that they will oppose the country's bid unless it acknowledges the crimes committed against the Armenians. Are the Turks really willing to risk their country's economic future merely in order to hide—or pretend to hide—an ugly fact about its origins? To believe this seems to require a view of Turkish ethnic pride that gets dangerously close to a national stereotype. In fact, many Turkish nationalists oppose E.U. membership; from their perspective, denying the Armenian genocide serves an eminently practical political purpose.

That being said, Akcam clearly has a point, and one that Americans, in particular, ought to be able to appreciate. Before the arrival of the first Europeans, there were, it is estimated, at least forty million indigenous people living in the Americas; by 1650, fewer than ten million were left. The decline was the result of casual cruelty on the one hand—diseases unwittingly spread—and systematic slaughter on the other. Every November, when American schoolchildren are taught about Thanksgiving, they are insistently told the story of how the Pilgrims, in their gratitude, entertained the kindly Wampanoag. We now know that the comity of that original Thanksgiving was entirely atypical, and that, by 1621, the Wampanoag were already a dying nation. While it was cowardly of Congress to pull H.R. 596, passing it would, in its own way, also have been problematic. We may side with the Armenians, but, historically speaking, we probably have more in common with the Turks. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

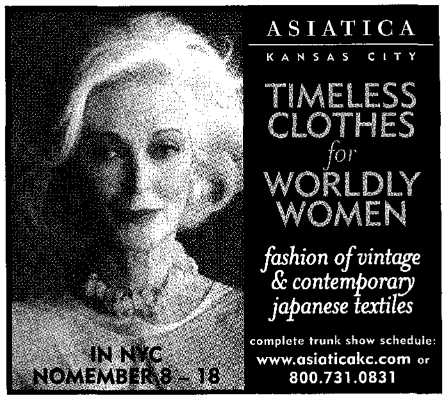
The Echo Maker, *by Richard Powers (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25).* This novel, a finalist for the National Book Award, addresses the question of how we know who we really are. Mark, who repairs machinery at a meat-processing plant, suffers a head injury that prevents him from recognizing his sister Karin; he believes that she is a look-alike sent to spy on him. Karin, who has spent her life trying to escape their small Nebraska town, returns to old lovers and habits she thought she'd renounced. Stung by Mark's rejection, she sends a desperate plea to an Oliver Sacks-like neurologist whose popular books have suddenly come under critical attack, causing fissures in his public persona and his seemingly perfect marriage. Powers's smooth coincidences and cute patter can be unconvincing and leaden, and he has a tendency to lapse into distracting repetitions. Yet his philosophical musings have the energy of a thriller, and he gives lyrical, haunting life to the landscape of the Great Plains.

The Uses of Enchantment, *by Heidi Julavits (Doubleday; $24.95).* The author's third novel is a spooky coming-of-age tale set in West Salem, Massachusetts, a town whose witch-hanging history both captivates and circumscribes the lives of the teen-age girls who reside there. One afternoon in 1985, sixteen-year-old Mary Veal disappears from field-hockey practice at the austere Semmering Academy; she reappears a few weeks later claiming to have been abducted. The truth of what happened is only hinted at in Mary's sexually charged experiences with her supposed captor and in her provocative exchanges with the therapist assigned to her case. He decides that Mary is lying—aspects of her story seem taken from a previous student's faked abduction, itself inspired by a centuries-old fable involving a kidnapped girl and witchcraft—but, it turns out, he is not without his own agenda. Julavits expertly keeps the reader baffled until the end, but beneath the mystery is a sophisticated meditation on truth and bias.



Journey to a Revolution, *by Michael Korda (HarperCollins; $24.95).* Korda, the former editor-in-chief of Simon & Schuster, marries history and memoir in this vivid account of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. After sketching Hungary's unhappy past, he recalls how he and three fellow Oxford students drove from London to Budapest in a rusty VW packed with much needed medical supplies. The son of a Hungarian émigré, Korda had never visited his father's homeland, but, having been raised on stories of Spanish Civil War heroics, he was "determined not to miss out" on the adventure offered by a similarly stirring cause. Korda and his companions fell in with the students manning the barricades, and he describes what they witnessed with unflinching precision: the collapse of a building riddled by shelling (the "unacknowledged spectator sport of the twentieth century") and tank turrets scattered "like huge crushed beetles."

The Great Escape, *by Kati Marton (Simon & Schuster; $27).* Among the Hungarian Jews who made their way to England and America as Hitler rose to power were four scientists, two filmmakers, two photographers, and a writer. These men, products of the same few *Gymnasien* and cafés, delivered the Manhattan Project, game theory, and "Casablanca." Marton, who fled Hungary as a child in 1957, illuminates Budapest's vertiginous Golden Age and the darkness that followed (a darkness that some of her subjects, notably Arthur Koestler, never shook). Seeing how abruptly the world could change, the Hungarians didn't doubt that they could change it. They also stuck together; even Leo Szilard, who crusaded against the bombs that he made possible, and Edward Teller, who sold Reagan on missile defense, stayed friends. By looking at these nine lives—salvaged, and crucial—Marton provides a moving measure of how much was lost.



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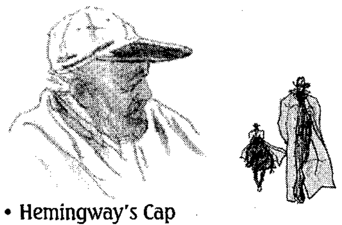

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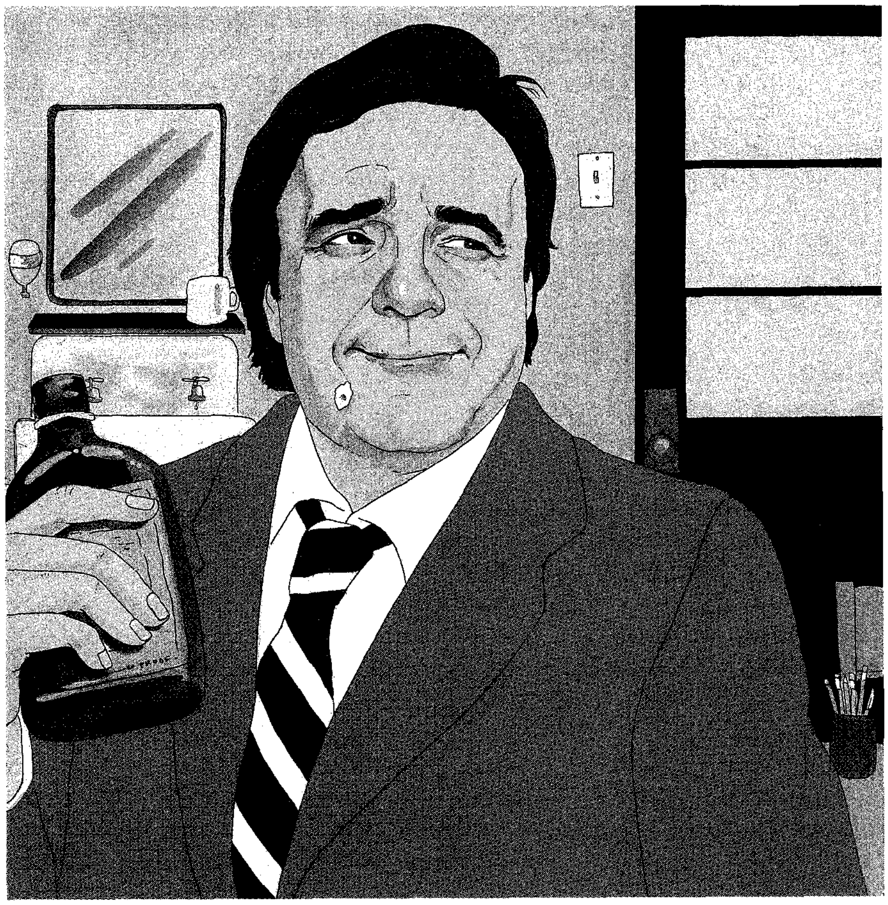
Simon Gray and Noah Haidle on mockery and mourning.

BY JOHN LAHR

Rueful is perhaps the best way to describe the British writer Simon Gray's rankling wit, which he has purveyed, over the decades, first from the West End stage and, most recently, from a series of hilarious, superbly written diaries. Gray is a sort of dandy of disappointments; for him, the light at the end of the tunnel is always an oncoming train. Listen to him meditate on the accusation that he brownnosed his way to the top, in his 2004 volume "The Smoking Diaries": "If only . . . I hadn't drunk so very much through my late forties, throughout my fifties, I might have—well, what? At least have got my plays returned more speedily by Trevor Nunn, for instance, possibly bits of them actually read by his predecessor at the National, Richard Eyre, to whom I never actually sent them, on the grounds that every time I met him he seemed to wince."

Gray's first West End hit, "Butley" (written in 1971 and now in revival at the Booth, under the direction of Nicholas Martin), draws on his early experiences as a lecturer in English literature at the University of London and proves him to have been an early connoisseur of his own collapse. Even before Ben Butley (Nathan Lane), a put-upon literature don, speaks his first bilious words to us from the fluorescent-lit clutter of his university warren, his personality is signalled by two things: the shaving cut on his face and his smoker's catarrh. (Butley, like Gray, is one of the contemporary theatre's world-class smokers; the stage directions insist that he "should smoke more frequently than the text indicates.") Bleeding and phlegm, you might say, become Butley. He is an alcoholic chain-smoker, a bored and unsupportive teacher, an indifferent father, a sad-sack bisexual who, in the course of the play, is dumped by both his wife and his boyfriend and protégé, Joey Keyston (Julian Ovenden), a young teacher with whom he shares his ramshackle college quarters. You'd be hard-pressed, in commercial comedy, to find any more bitter or beleaguered gourmand of grief; if Butley had a coat of arms, it would be the raised glass and the raised eyebrow on a field of black and blue.

Language is Butley's bulwark against the vicissitudes of life. Humor is how he disguises pain and also how he dishes it out. He can be killingly funny. When Joey asks whether his friend misses marriage, Butley replies, "Only the sex and violence. And these days one can get those anywhere." His jokes, with their strong undertow of regret, accomplish the double whammy of annihilation and invigoration. Butley tries to explain to another professor—a fussy and frantic Byron specialist named Edna Shaft (the delightful Dana Ivey)—why he and his wife are no longer cohabiting. "She told me that if I was half a man I'd leave," he says. "But, on discovering that *she* was, she left herself." When Edna comments that divorce is always so sad for the children, Butley chimes in, "Yes, we do suffer the most."



Nathan Lane as a bilious and bullying literature professor in "Butley."

LARA TOMLIN

A combination of self-knowledge and self-loathing is what gives Gray's humor its particularly acrid brio; Lane, who does a passable English accent, puts his comic expertise behind the lines and makes them pay. If he lacks the sinew of Alan Bates, who first played the part, Lane nonetheless manages to work himself up into a fine frenzy that is uniquely his own. At one point, giddy with ennui at the prospect of reading more student essays with subtitles like "Hate and Redemption," "Pity and Terror," and "Sin and Salvation," Butley heaves the homework around the room. (The night I saw the show, one page stuck to some flypaper in the office eaves, scoring a scenic and comic bull's-eye.) "Why don't those cleaning women do their job properly?" Butley brays. "Standards are declining everywhere. Ruskin's char threw Carlyle's history of the French Revolution out with the other rubbish." He adds, "But then they took pride in their work in those days."

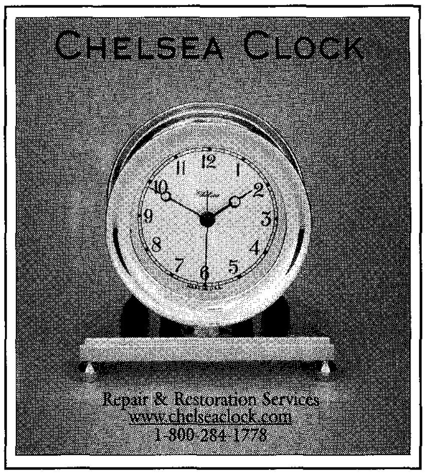
Although Gray's wit never fails him, the play's structure does. Every student, teacher, and acquaintance who enters through the frosted-glass door into Butley's stale world is little more than a feed for his coruscating voice. The repetitiveness of the traffic plan and the soft pitch of the other characters insure that although Butley may be firing on all cylinders the drama isn't. The play makes few demands on the audience, and this accounts, perhaps, for its commercial success, as well as for its limitations as a work of art. Only once—when the suave, camel-hair-coated publisher Reg Nuttal (Darren Pettie) refuses to be provoked by Butley's fierce mockery—does another character become an agent of insight. "I'm not playing with you," Reg says, seeing the impotence behind the pyrotechnics of Butley's provocation. "So don't say one more word, eh? Not a word." Butley does, of course; for his trouble, he gets punched to his knees. "There," Reg says as he exits. "Is that what you wanted?" In that moment, we see that the goal of Butley's wit is to inflict his sense of emptiness on others. Ultimately, Butley sees this, too. "I'm too old to play with the likes of you," he says, dropping his mask of detachment and dismissing a student he was toying with for his own amusement.

By the finale, Butley's gloom hasn't so much lifted as shifted. He settles into his reading chair with a volume of T. S. Eliot and a kind of existential resignation that seems reinforced by the large photograph of Eliot staring out at us from the bookshelf behind him. The sudden inertia of the moment—Lane's Butley spends most of the play caroming around the stage like a pinball—brings to mind Gray's observation on the etymology of the phrase "flotsam and jetsam." "That's what it feels like to be me," he wrote in "The Year of the Jouncer." "Something thrown on the waters, a floater, and a bobber—but thrown by whom? Fate? Circumstances? The ambition of others?" Gray by name, it would seem that he is also gray by nature. His game is to disabuse us of our illusions and to make a place onstage for ambivalence, which is something to hope for.

Morbid grief is given a much more daring theatrical outing in Noah Haidle's "Vigils" (at Chicago's Goodman Theatre, under the vivacious direction of Kate Whoriskey). As he demonstrated last year with "Mr. Marmalade," Haidle, who is twenty-eight, is precociously able to turn the internal dramas of the psyche into thrilling stage pictures; here he deals with the problem of mourning. In a high-ceilinged white bedroom, whose walls are cracked like the veneer of an Old Master painting, a widow (the excellent Johanna Day) replays the story of her marriage to a fireman, who died two years earlier while trying to save a baby from a burning house. The widow is trapped in the constant repetition of her own narrative; she literally can't separate herself from her story or from her love object. Her late husband's soul (Marc Grapey)—a big guy with goggles and strange headgear—lives in the chest at the foot of her bed and comes out for conversation and the occasional hug. The soul, too, is trapped and wants to be free, along with the body (Steve Key).

As the story of the marriage emerges—a brief fling, pregnancy, shotgun wedding, miscarriage, the fireman's thoughts of leaving—Haidle manages to show, with terrific theatrical panache, how we fictionalize our memories of love, idealizing the lost one and repressing the negative. At one point, for instance, the soul admits to the widow that, as a kid, with a BB gun he shot out the eye of an old woman, and she died a month later. "Little boys get into mischief," the widow says.

The play is a kind of comedy of separation; the real and the imagined dance, wrestle, and dream of flying. Their high jinks are a counterpoint to Haidle's shrewdly innocent, poignant dialogue. "My heart beats," the widow says. "Out of no will of my own. Because that's what hearts do. They beat and they break." Haidle even manages a scenic coup of theatrical closure at the finale. "I used to only sleep on my side but now I sleep right in the middle," the widow says, of her bed. She gets her blue sky and her new day. This is the optimistic ending of a young man, but over all "Vigils" is the work of a sophisticated playwright. Haidle writes with an informed heart and with a big career ahead of him. ♦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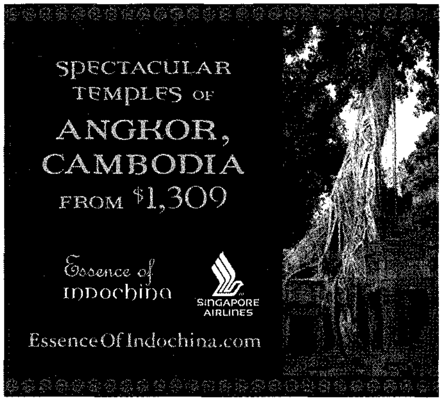
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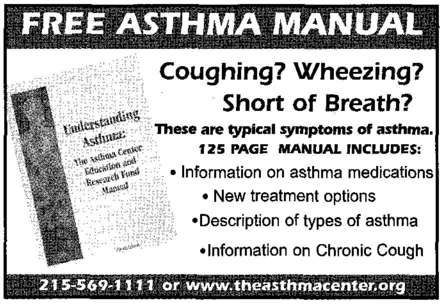

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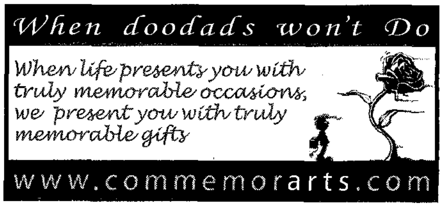
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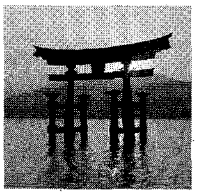

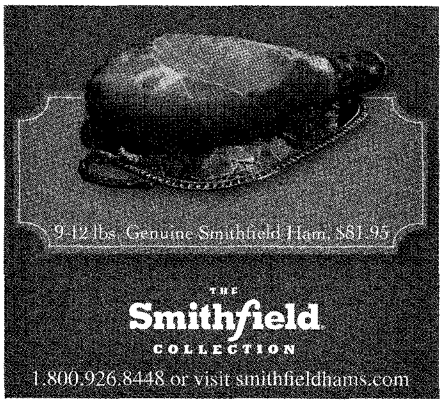

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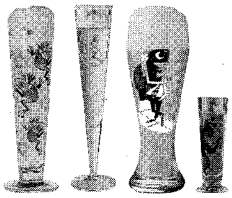

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DANCING

IT AIN'T HIM, BABE

Twyla Tharp's take on Bob Dylan.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Four years ago, "Movin' Out," a musical conceived, directed, and choreographed by Twyla Tharp, to songs by Billy Joel, opened on Broadway, and it was a big success, both artistically and commercially. "Movin' Out" was simple in its conception. It had a bare-bones, iconic plot—some suburban teen-agers were drafted into the Vietnam War, came back damaged, then got better—and the songs were performed by a band on a raised platform, so that the people onstage could devote themselves to the art that Tharp knows best, dancing. The show had no dialogue. It just went song to song—that is, dance number to dance number—with the lyrics, in Tharp's sequencing, roughly keyed to the events of the story and thereby, it seemed, calling them forth. In "The Times They Are A-Changin'," which opened last week at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre, Tharp reuses this formula, with the music of Bob Dylan. Dylan, however, is different from Billy Joel: not just a bigger artist but a symbol, of a period and a generation. So Tharp must have felt that for him she had to come up with a fancier treatment. In any case, that's what she did: "The Times" is set at a circus. In an interview with Katie Couric two weeks ago, Tharp said that she got this idea from the circus imagery in Dylan's lyrics and also from their dreamlike quality—their use, as she put it, of transformation. That happens in circuses. Also, a circus setting would legitimatize exaggeration, which she felt Dylan's hallucinatory lyrics called for. In other words, what she tried to create for Dylan was something like a poem or a vision—or a song—rather than a play.

In the end, however, she did make a sort of play, a fusion of her own long-term interest in family warfare (see her 1981 "The Catherine Wheel") with Dylan's songs about the generation gap—for example, "The Times They Are A-Changin'." In her show, the owner and ringmaster of the circus is Captain Ahrab (Thom Sesma), an evil tyrant who abuses his innocent son, Coyote (Michael Arden); his kind, worse-for-the-wear girlfriend, Cleo (Lisa Brescia); and everyone else in his vicinity—namely, six Pierrot-like clowns and Cleo's dog, whom he eventually garrotes. Then the times, they change. Coyote pairs off with Cleo, and the clowns kill Ahrab. (Or I think he died—it was hard to tell, because the scene was lit only by flashlights, but he didn't reappear after that.) Coyote takes over the circus, which now becomes a democratic organization: everyone gets ringmaster wear. They all sing "Forever Young," and the curtain comes down.

I don't think Tharp set much store by this plot. She took little trouble with it. Coyote is all gawky goodness; Cleo is the whore with the heart of gold. Ahrab does nothing but sneer and snarl and show us his big teeth. Tharp seems to have tried to beef up his character with references to his near-namesake, Captain Ahab. Like Melville's hero, Ahrab has a damaged leg and a tendency to raise his arms, in protest, to the unanswering firmament. But he remains a cartoon, like the others.

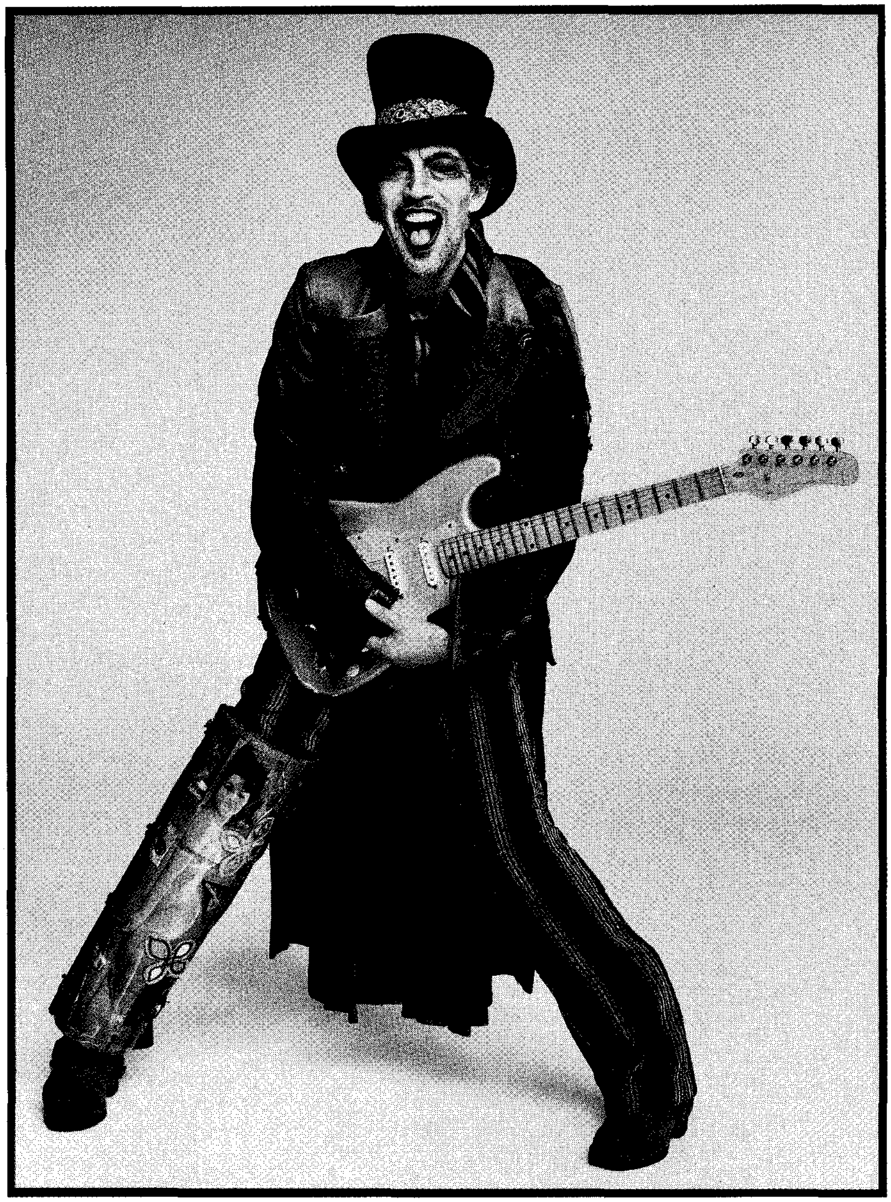
This would be all right—the teen-agers in "Movin' Out" were also types—except that what takes the place of dramatic richness is not that interesting. A great deal of "The Times" consists of circus acts: stilt-walking, tightrope-walking, contortionism, tumbling, clown routines. This is the thing for which all else—realism, drama—was shoved aside, and which was supposed to convey to us the essence of Dylan. Accordingly, it is elaborately produced. The lighting, by Donald Holder, is very studied; the costumes, by Santo Loquasto, are creepy and fantastic. (One clown wears a frightening-looking crown of spikes.) And the performers lay on a great deal of life-is-a-dream and "Ridi, Pagliaccio" shading. But what is this material, really? It's circus acts, which, in view of the fact that none of the participants had prior circus experience, are done very well, but not as well as what you'd see in a regular circus.

At the same time, the silly plot keeps coming forward, asking us to pay attention to it, even as it undercuts the lyrical—song-to-song, vision-to-vision—logic of the show. After Ahrab beats up Cleo, she comes out and sings "Don't Think Twice"—that is, she announces that she's leaving him. Then she walks right back into the shack she shares with him. A larger problem is that without any expansion of these characters you weary of them quickly. Tharp has devised some wonderful things for Cleo's dog, who is played by Jason McDole. He does ear-cockings and body twitches and eager, can-we-take-a-walk-now advances and sad, O.K.-not-now retreats that are exquisitely doglike. But he uses up these bits in the first fifteen minutes of the show, after which you figure that if he does that ear-cock one more time you'll run up onstage and strangle him. The same is true, more true, of Ahrab's teeth-gnashings and Coyote's artless pants-hitchings.

The dog brings up another matter: sentimentality. Tharp, throughout her career, has been notably tough-minded. The characters in her dances have competed with each other, razzed each other, hurt each other. Rape and murder have occurred on her stage. But sometimes inside a tough guy there beats a marshmallow heart. Or—more likely, in Tharp's case—sentimentality may show itself, simply as the obverse of cruelty, when the artist can't think of anything else to do. The dog isn't the only mawkish item in "The Times." One of the clowns is put forward as a sort of gay joke, Nellie and sweet, deliquescing into a pink hankie as Coyote and Cleo declare their love for each other. The actor, Charlie Neshyba-Hodges, is excellent, but, like the dog, he exhausts his material fast.

Many of the problems with the show are probably traceable to a decision that Tharp made—early on, obviously—about the music. In "Movin' Out," because the songs were performed by a band, Tharp was able to cast virtuoso dancers as the leads, and to tell the story through dancing. In "The Times" she chose to have the twenty-five songs delivered by the actors, which meant that she had to hire vocalists as the leads. They sing well. Lisa Brescia's country-Western renditions, in particular, are lovely. But, because the leads aren't professional dancers, there isn't much dancing. I counted one sustained ensemble number. (It was for the clowns, most of whom are veteran dancers.) The lovers get no real pas de deux. They jitterbug a little bit here, polka briefly there, but that's it. And what is a Twyla Tharp show if it doesn't have dance? Dance is what she knows how to do, and when she doesn't do it there's not a lot to watch.

One wonders, in the end, how much Tharp likes Dylan's work. Though they are the same age—sixty-five—she belongs to the sock-hop generation of the late fifties and early sixties. On the evidence of her dances, her idea of teen rebellion is hot rods and hormones, jitterbug and juvie, the world of "Rock Around the Clock." Dylan belongs to the real sixties, to sit-ins and drugs and apocalypticism, the world of—what? Of him. Tharp never had any politics to speak of. (Marcia Siegel's recent book on her, "Howling Near Heaven," says that her political sympathies, if anything, lean right.) When a serious artist produces a dud, a lot of energy can be spent trying to figure out why, but sometimes the reason is just that the artist took on the wrong subject, and later realized this, and couldn't back out, and ended up having to fake something. For "Movin' Out," Tharp approached Billy Joel, and you can see why—same teens, same cars. "The Times," on the other hand, was Dylan's idea. He approached Tharp. She should have said no. ♦



Thom Sesma as Captain Ahrab. Photograph by Ruven Afanador.

THE ART WORLD

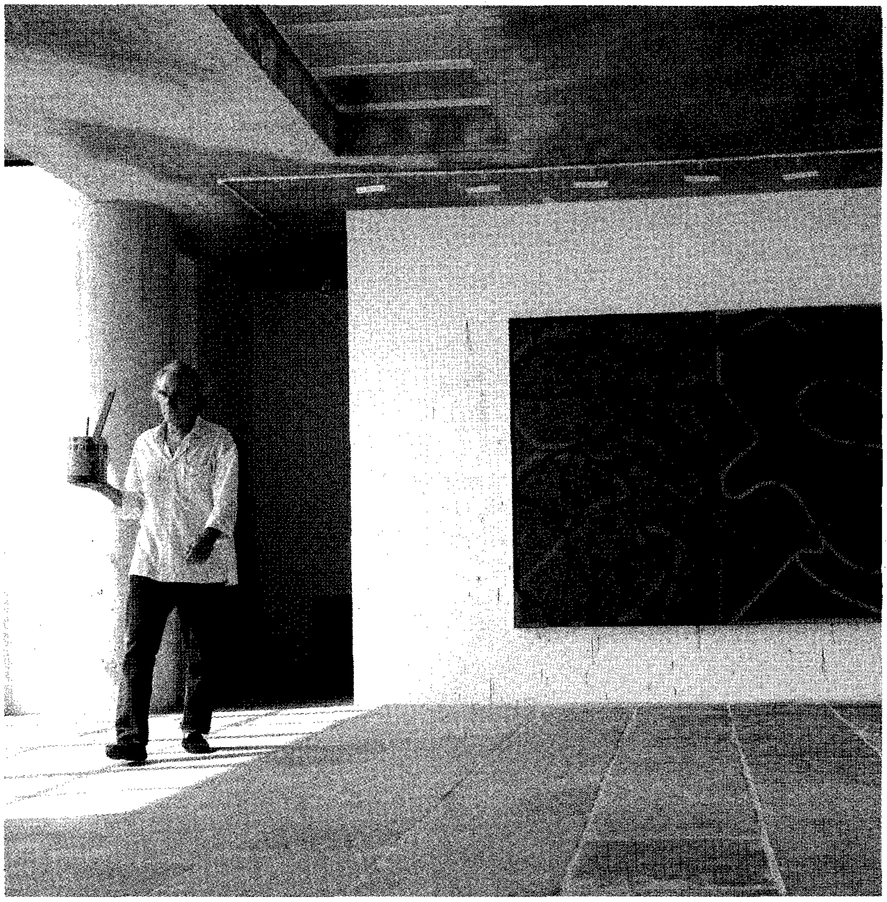
TRUE COLORS

A Brice Marden retrospective.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

"It's hard to look at paintings," Brice Marden once said. "You have to be able to bring all sorts of things together in your mind, your imagination, in your whole body." Good paintings make the exercise worth the trouble. Great paintings make it seem valuable in itself, as one of the more rewarding things that having minds, imaginations, and bodies lets us do. Marden's current retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art confirms him, at the age of sixty-eight, as the most profound abstract painter of the past four decades. There are fifty-six paintings in the show, dating from broody monochromes made in 1964-66, when Marden was fresh out of art school at Yale, to new, clamorous, six-panelled compositions, twenty-four feet long, of overlaid loopy bands in six colors. (His several styles of laconic form and smoldering emotion might be termed "passive-expressive.") As selected and installed by Gary Garrels, the senior curator at the Hammer Museum, in Los Angeles, the ensemble affords an adventure in aesthetic experience—and, tacitly, in ethical, and even spiritual experience. There are also some fifty drawings: too few. Marden's drawings (and etchings, which are entirely absent) constitute an immense achievement in their own right, and their resourcefulness and grace are best perceived in quantity.

Marden was born in Bronxville, New York. His father was a mortgage servicer. Inspired by a sophisticated neighbor who painted, Marden grew up avid for art. He underwent classical academic training at the Boston University of Fine and Applied Arts, from 1958 to 1961. Manet transfixed him; he imitated Cézanne and early Matisse. He discovered Old Masters, chiefly Zurbarán, who would give him lasting sustenance. Marden belongs to a generation of tough-minded American painters who arose in the aftermath of Abstract Expressionism and during the onsets of Pop and minimalism. His Yale classmates included Chuck Close and Robert Mangold, as well as Richard Serra. He is not a minimalist—a label often lazily affixed to him, as to other artists of the era whose deliberate styles register the historical logic of minimalism (a debunking of pictorial rhetoric and illusion) while resisting its impersonality. He took practical guidance from the work of Jasper Johns and, in his early paintings, adopted Johns's matte, fleshy medium of oils mixed with beeswax—brushing it on, then smoothing it with a kitchen spatula. Marden may usefully be considered a late-entry Abstract Expressionist: a conservative original, the last valedictorian of the New York School. His early enthusiasms included Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline, and thoughts of Jackson Pollock irradiate his career. Barnett Newman looms behind some of his less successful experiments. But the painter who mattered most to the precocious Marden's maturation was Mark Rothko.



Marden in his studio: the most profound abstract painter of the past four decades.

JENNIFER S. ALTMAN

When viewing the apparently all-gray or all-beige canvases in the show's first room, try this: approach them slowly from a distance, attempting to keep the surface in focus. At a certain point, your eyes will give up. The surface eludes them. Sombre color seems at once to engulf you, with a sort of oceanic tenderness, and infinitely to recede. This effect distills that of the furry-edged, drifting masses of ineffable color with which Rothko aimed, he said, to evoke a mood of "the single human figure, alone in a moment of utter immobility." The young Marden's version is cooler and more calculated. He employed the Rothkovian tactics of hanging paintings unframed, with paint running around the edges, low on the wall—commonly centered at about the height of your solar plexus—to address the viewer body-to-body. Further emphasizing the painting as a physical object, a narrow margin of bare canvas along the bottom displays runs and drips of the work's several layers of paint. The device is a mite gimmicky, and Marden soon discontinued it. When using more than one color, he applied each to a separate, abutted panel, in diptychs and triptychs, to literalize their division.

All of this might be deemed mainly clever, in a standard key of sixties avant-gardism. Certain titles ("The Dylan Painting," "Nico") declare citizenship in the decade's rock-and-roll, stoned Bohemia. But the color! It can seem that Marden has not only an eye but a taste, smell, touch, and ear for excruciating tone and anonymous hue. His grays and grayed greens and blues recall the ungraspable nuances of Velázquez and, at times, the simmering ardors of Caspar David Friedrich. (Am I dropping too many names? There's no helping it. Marden, an artist bred in museums, communes rather directly with all past painters whose temperaments correspond to his own.) While working on his ultimate series of monochromes, the exceedingly refined "Grove Group," of the early seventies, which were inspired by sojourns on the Greek island of Hydra, he made notes on colors that he found in nature: a tree trunk "black brown yellow cold dark"; an olive grove "evasive silver gray green, blue gray green light, black gray browns"; and an Aegean sky "blue, gray, yellow, sulphur, turquoise, yellow, blue." These quotes are from a remarkable essay, in the show's catalogue, by the art historian Richard Shiff, who braces a discussion of Marden's self-abnegating sensitivity—"knowing yourself by forgetting about yourself," in the artist's words—with apposite thoughts from the founder of American pragmatism, Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce described the transition in the mind of sensation into feeling, defining experience as "consciousness of the action of a new feeling in destroying the old feeling." That universal truth epitomizes Marden's best art, which makes a practically religious tenet of vulnerable openness to "new feeling." It is a romantic faith, and he observed it with the discipline of an eremite monk.

In the late seventies and early eighties, apparently with Newman in mind, Marden tried to monumentalize his work with architectonic arrays of panels, alluding to Greek temples. Forced grandeur smothered the lyrical intimacy of his colors and textures. While continuing to paint, he regrounded his enterprise through compulsive drawing, often with ink-dipped twigs, in flurries of impetuous line, informed by Chinese calligraphy, Pollock, and latent, dancerly figuration—"letting the drawing itself do the work," he said. (The antic graphism of Cy Twombly may have been a factor, but Marden maintains a conservative loyalty to unified composition, as Twombly does not.) This led to pale-colored paintings of linear networks, irregular but tensile (as if lightly spring-loaded), which he made in a fluid turpentine-cut medium, wielding sword-length brushes from the shoulder. His "Cold Mountain" series, of 1989-91, named for the Chinese poet Han Shan, strives with mixed success to maintain the spontaneity of drawing on a very large scale. The concentration required to control the big, ungainly strokes is both heroic and taxing; the works can seem to use up as much energy as they impart. But Marden was onto something. With growing confidence, he developed the lines into freely brushed bands of color. Later, these became slow, deliberate shapes in themselves. As color resumed a leading role in his art, the bands turned determinedly gawky, anti-gestural and anti-calligraphic, making you look straight at them.

Two new mural-size paintings, from a series called "The Propitious Garden of Plane Image," are his most ambitious to date. Their linear complexity and discordant color shock. They deploy a system. On each of six panels, bands in five of the six primary and secondary colors overlay a ground of the sixth. From left to right, the ground colors are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. The bands writhe like the snakes of the Laocoön while staying dead flat. The phrase "plane image," Marden has said, emphasizes his constant will to treat picture and paint as one thing. Looking at these paintings is, in a word, hard. They attract and repel in roughly equal measure. As at a party, you're peripherally aware, wherever you are, of things happening elsewhere. Marden thereby introduces an element of time. We are to view the work episodically—our minds, imaginations, and bodies riveted at each point, but without ultimate resolution. On a first encounter, they create sensations not yet transformed into feelings. Win or lose, Marden's wager offers something that is increasingly rare in art: high stakes. ♦

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Volume LXXXII, No. 36, November 6, 2006. The New Yorker (ISSN 0028-792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: Jan. 23 & 30, Feb. 13 & 20, July 10 & 17, Aug. 7 & 14, Dec. 25 & Jan. 1) by The Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Louis Cona, vice-president and publisher; Jamie Engel, associate publisher; Alatia Bradley, advertising director; Karen Quinn-Panzer, advertising director; Judy Safir, director of finance and business operations; Daniella Wells, executive director marketing & strategic planning; Janine Silvera, executive director of creative services; Jacqueline Cinguina, director of integrated marketing; Steve Porter, creative director/advertising; Ellen Reid, creative services director; Edward Klaris, general counsel. Advance Magazine Publishers Inc.: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, president and C.E.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.O.O.; Jill Bright, executive vice-president–human resources; John Buese, executive vice-president–chief information officer; David Orlin, senior vice-president–strategic sourcing; Robert Bennis, senior vice-president–real estate; Maurie Perl, senior vice-president–chief communications officer. Shared services provided by Advance Magazine Group: Steven T. Florio, Advance Magazine Group vice chairman; David B. Chemidlin, senior vice-president–general manager, shared services center. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. R123242885. Canada Post return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

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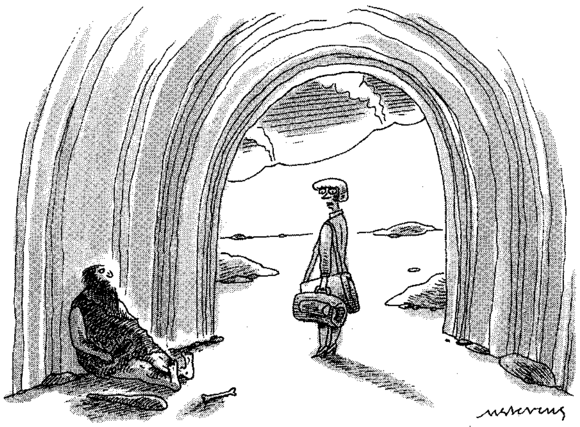
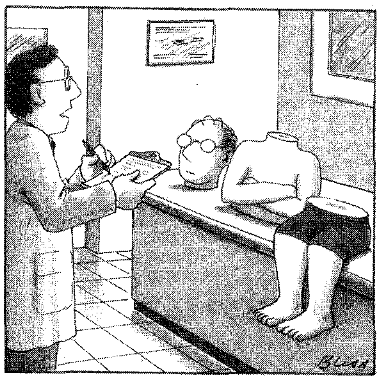
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Leo Cullum, must be received by Sunday, November 5th. Finalists in the October 23rd contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 20th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"It's not just that he walks upright and uses complex tools. He also makes me laugh."
Andy Sapora, Union City, N.J.



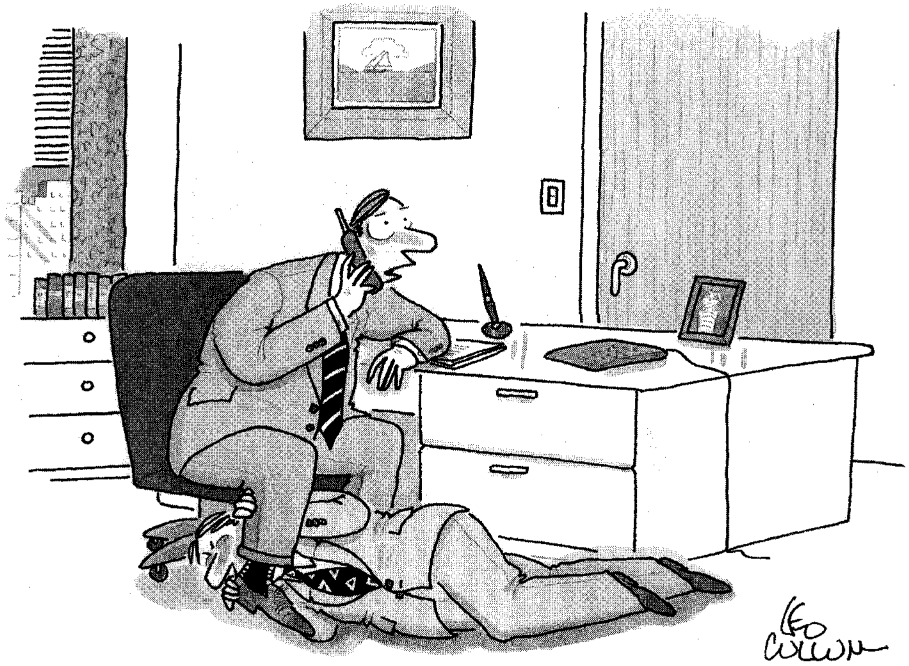
THE FINALISTS

"This is the most advanced case of Surrealism I've seen."
Eric Sagalyn, Worcester, Mass.

"The good news is all the pieces fit."
William Huggett, Poquoson, Va.

"Let's just keep an eye on it for a while."
Steven Lubliner, Petaluma, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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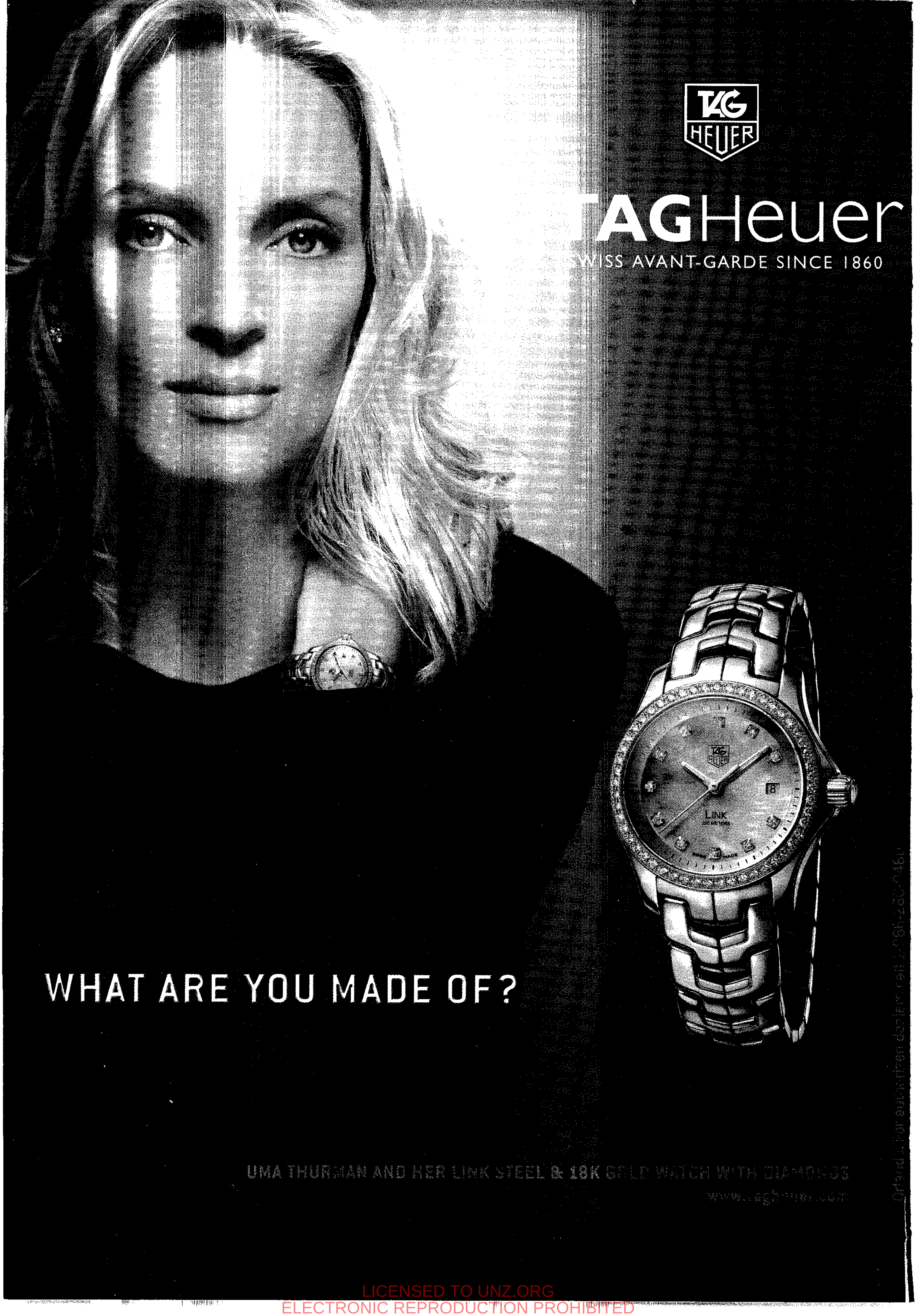

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